

# COAL MINING DAYS

In Marion County, Iowa

✂ 1880s - 1990s ✂

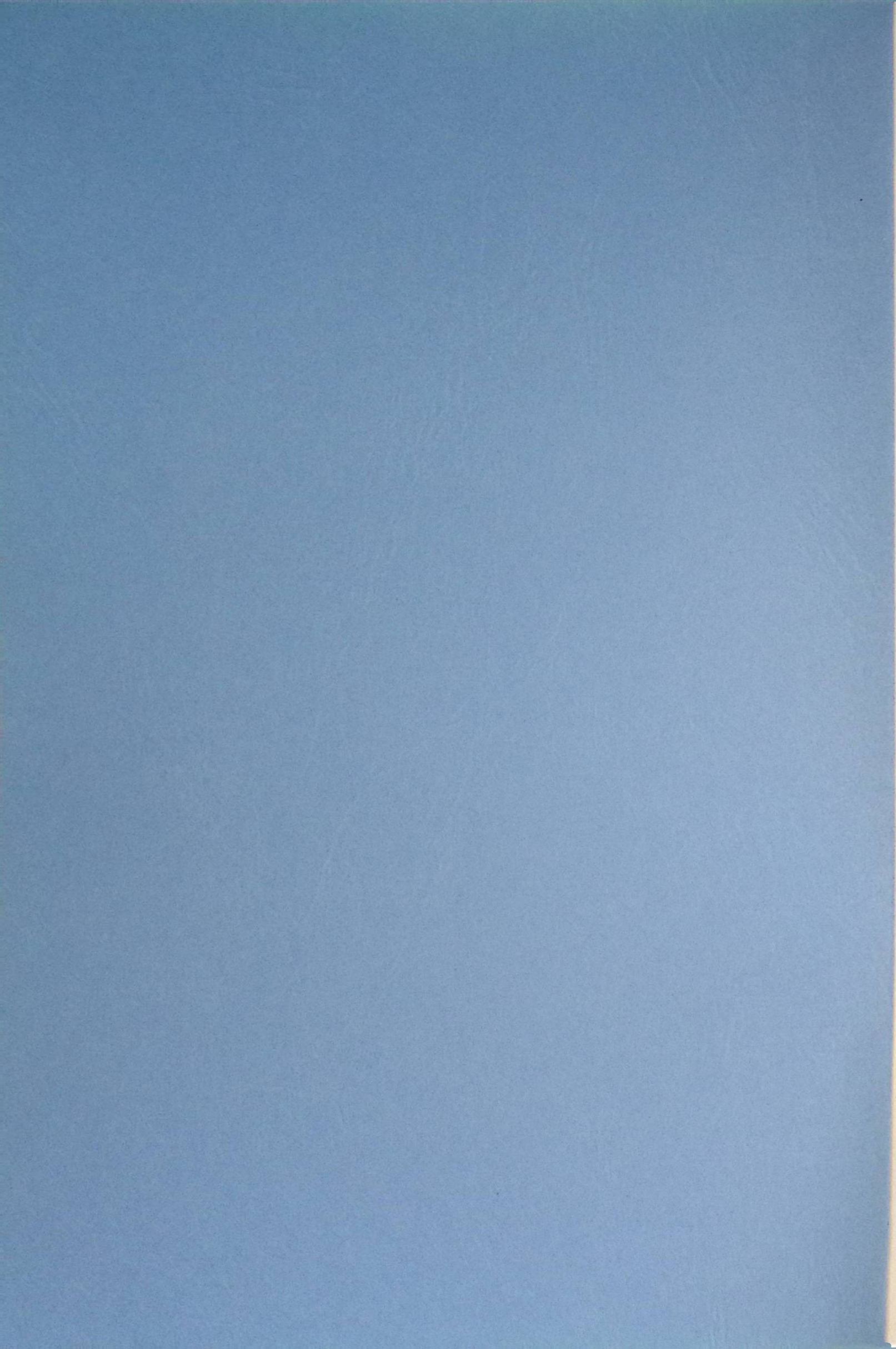
by  
Harriet Heusinkveld



*Barnett Coal Co. #3  
Knoxville, Iowa 1938-1947*

Cover Design - Bob Wilson







JACK ROUSE ASSOCIATES

© Copyright 1995, Harriet Heusinkveld  
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 95-92685  
FOURTH EDITION, 2003







# **COAL MINING DAYS**

**in Marion County, Iowa**  
**1880s - 1990s**

**Harriet Heusinkveld**  
Professor Emerita of Geography  
Central College, Pella, Iowa  
1995

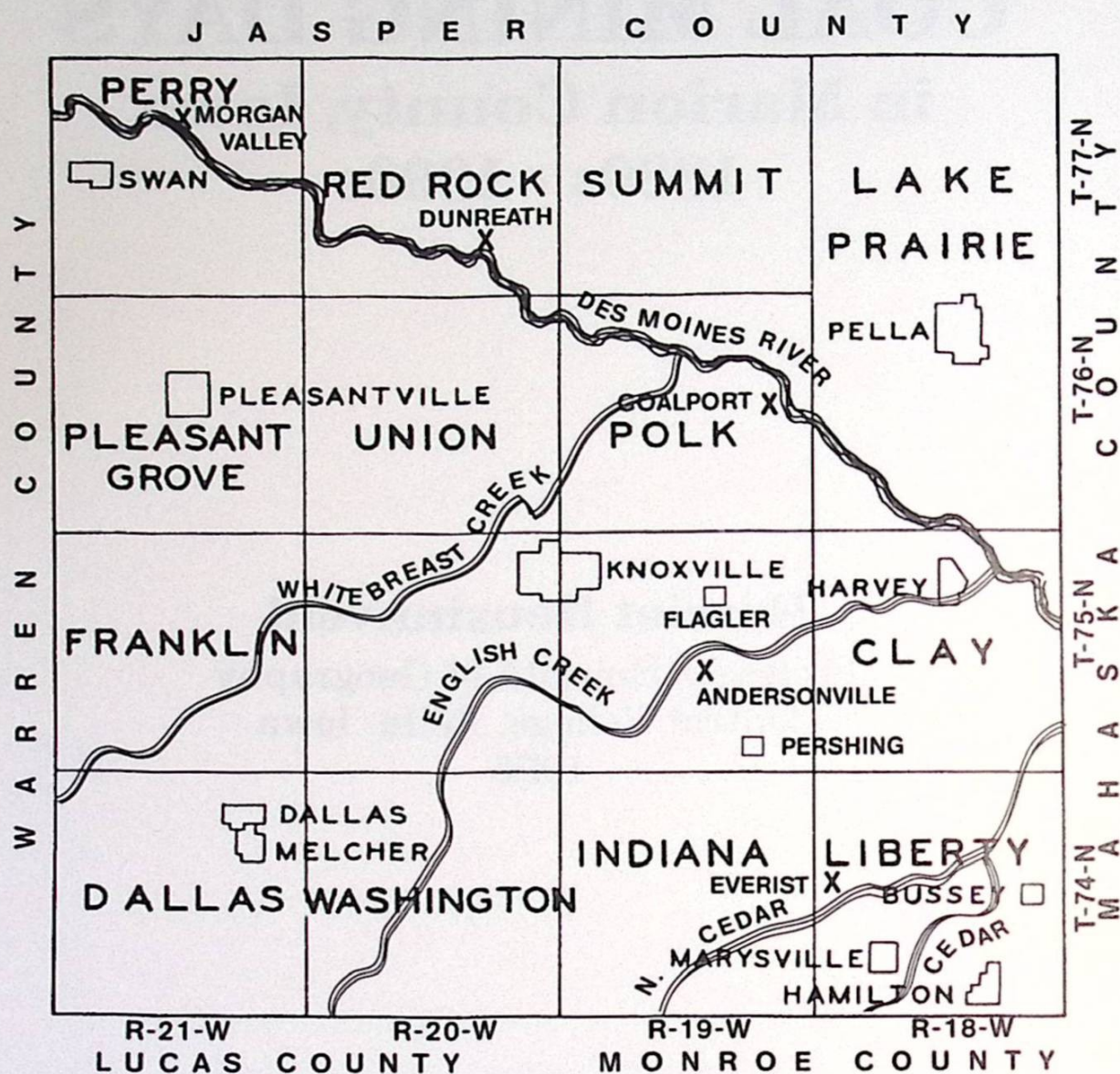
Robert (Bob) Wilson  
Cover Artist

Produced by Pella Printing Company, Inc., Pella, Iowa, 50219



# MARION COUNTY

## IOWA



Map of Former Coal Mining Camps and Towns

X - No longer inhabited



---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Table of Contents

Foreword and Acknowledgements ..... 5

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
Part I. Introduction to Mining .....	10
1. A Thumbnail Sketch of Coal Mining in Iowa and Marion County ....	12
2. Why Coal Beds in Marion County: A Little Lesson in Geology .....	18
Part II. Earliest Mines .....	21
3. Flagler and Other Early Mining Towns .....	23
Coalport	
Swan	
Morgan Valley	
Flagler	
Part III. Farming Settlements That Became Coal Towns .....	31
4. Dunreath .....	33
5. Melcher-Dallas .....	40
6. Harvey .....	50
Portrait of A.C. Geery	
The Mine Mule	
Part IV. Early Mining Camps Which Have Disappeared .....	58
7. Everist .....	59
8. Andersonville .....	65
Part V. Pershing, Largest Marion County Mining Camp .....	73
9. Pershing the Miracle Mining Camp .....	74
10. Growing and Growing Pains in Pershing .....	82



11. Religious, Social, and Recreational Institutions in Pershing .....	93
12. The Pershing Miner's Life.....	104
13. Role of Women in Pershing .....	114
14. The Ominous Side of Strikes.....	119
15. From Riches to Rags in the Distressing Thirties .....	125
16. #14 - The End of Underground Mining in Pershing.....	135

## Part VI. Portraits of Miners Who Made a Difference ..... 145

17. Joseph Fry and William Fry, Father and Son.....	146
18. Two Beloved Pershing Mine Administrators.....	154
Tom Rowland	
Earl Long	
19. The Jack and Sarah Moline Barnett Family (and their Barnett #3 mine) .....	159
20. Tom Wignall: A Man of Ingenuity and Integrity.....	170

## Part VII. Modern Times and Problems ..... 175

21. Revolutionary Changes in Coal Mining .....	176
22. Impact of Coal Mining on the Environment .....	188
Bibliography.....	191
Index.....	194



## FOREWORD

When I came to Pella in 1937 as a student at Central College, I was amazed and fascinated to see coal mines and slag heaps and to learn that coal mining was an important part of the economy here in Marion County. Later at the University of Iowa, my advisor, Dr. Harold McCarty, who had spent his boyhood years in the mining town of Hiteman in Monroe County, urged me to research coal mining and its relation to population distribution as the subject for my doctoral dissertation, and I decided to do that. I had interviews with people involved in various aspects of mining - owners, superintendents, and miners, and miners' families. I was given the rare privilege (it was illegal) of going down the shaft of the mechanized Lovilia #3 mine, walking for a distance through the mine, and observing the miners at work.

Later I shared my interest in the local coal mining situation with my Central College students in economic geography. We took field trips to Buxton, the famous ex-mining coal camp in neighboring Monroe County, and our guide, a very old black ex-miner, regaled us with tales of the old mining days.

We visited Iowa's largest strip mine at Pershing, southeast of Knoxville, and watched the giant dragline and the big shovels at work, and our guide took us through the tippie (my female students were angry because they got their hair very dirty, and they were having dates that evening).

Another day we visited Pershing to learn about life in a mining camp. Miner Paul Provenzano was our guide. Some time later after the Pershing strip mine had closed down, we visited the Wilcox Wildlife Preserve, a park incorporating the huge slag heaps left behind.

In 1994, a group headed by Dr. Joyce Huizer of Central College and made up of Marion County ex-coal miners, citizens of former mining towns, elementary teachers, and college professors, and anyone else interested got together to organize a committee to discuss ways of preserving the history of coal mining in Marion County - before it is too late.

Projects the group is attempting include a video on Marion County's coal mines, a curriculum on Marion County coal mining for elementary school study, setting up a museum, a cassette for the car for visitors who wish to drive through the old mining areas, and a written history - and to have these ready in time to be incorporated in the Iowa Sesquicentennial observance of 1996.



My interest in the lore of coal mining was revived by being a part of this group, and I decided to write this book. It is a challenging and rewarding task. I am meeting people I would ordinarily never meet and learning from them, and I respect their knowledge, not only of coal mining but also their views on life and how to live it.

My main interest is in the people who were a part of the mining industry and their problems - rather than tables of statistics of tons of coal mined, and so on. But it is impossible to separate the coal miners from the mines, just as it would be impossible to separate farmers from the land, so I aim to present a picture, though elementary, of the layout of a mine and the tasks undertaken in the coal mines as well.

The ups and downs of coal mining in the County - failure or success - depended on so many complex factors - the weather in any given year; physical difficulties - water in the mines, running into a fault, etc.; laws passed by the Iowa Legislature regarding coal mining; national regulations related to freight rates and amount charged for a ton of coal; general state of the economy at any given time; competition with other types of fuels; competition with other coal fields in the U.S.; political party of the U.S. President; transportation technology (wagons, railroads, trucks); mine equipment technology; and labor relations, the latter an overwhelmingly important factor. Each of these is encountered in relation to particular situations in this book.

In order to highlight the coal miners' lives, I have included a few of what I call portraits (profiles) of certain people. Of course, every person's life is different from all others, but these sample people - diggers, mule drivers, superintendents, and foremen of the mine are in a way representative of the many others who occupy like positions in the mines.

In the earliest days of mining, most of Iowa's miners lived in camps owned by the mining companies. There were many such mining camps, all now disappeared except one - Pershing. I am particularly interested in the study of Pershing because it was the largest mining camp in Iowa from the 1930s through the 1960s, and second, because it is the only camp to survive to the present time, though now in a changed role. It is possible to see how it looks now and to learn (and imagine) how it was, by talking to the people who still live there. I have devoted eight chapters to Pershing.

Everist and Andersonville mining camps, the first about three miles south and the other about three miles north of Pershing, are also discussed because of their relationships to Pershing.



Three towns of a more diverse economic background but with a heavy dependence on coal mining are Melcher-Dallas, Harvey, and Dunreath, all well known towns in Marion County, and each occupies a chapter in the book.

Inasmuch as through the years there were over 500 mines in Marion County, it was necessary to select some representative mines for discussion. I have chosen Pershing #12, Pershing #14, and Lovilia #3 for discussion of big shaft mines; Barnett #3 as representative of a small mine, family owned and family operated. The Wilkinson mine (Pershing) and the Vander Zyl mines of Pella, Otley, and Monroe are presented as representative of Marion County's various strip mines.

I am grateful to many people for their help -

To Bonnie Crook of the *Knoxville Journal-Express* and her staff for allowing me to use their files. I spent many hours and days reading articles in every issue of the newspaper from 1919 to 1954. It would have been impossible to write this book without those newspapers. Through them I was able to capture history as it was written, usually more accurate than people's memories.

To Bob Wilson, art teacher at Twin Cedars School, for permission to use his painting of the Barnett Mine #3 as the cover design.

To people who made valuable unpublished manuscripts available to me: to Edna Fry Moses of Oskaloosa who allowed me to use the 110-page *Journal* written by her brother, William Fry; to the Knoxville Library for *The History of Andersonville* by historian C.B. Campbell; to Douglas Wilson, Citrus Heights, California, for *The Barnetts and Flagler*, the story of the Barnett coal mining family; to Carolyn Barnett Creger, Casper, Wyoming, for her book *World War II Experiences of the Barnett Brothers*; to Winona Davis, Attica, Iowa, for *Coal Mining in Marion County* written as a Central College class assignment in the 1940s; and to Woodrow Geery, Knoxville, for *The Mine Mule* a whimsical piece written just for this book.

To my brother, Willis Heusinkveld, Centerville, who always comes through with just what I need. He placed an ad in the *Centerville Iowegian* and obtained the words and music of *A Dream of the Miner's Child*, which several miners had tried to reconstruct for me but could not remember accurately and which librarians and booksellers could not locate.

To Orbra Geery, Harvey, ex-miner who shared with me an impressive 39-inch long blueprint dated 1920 of the huge Pershing #12 mine, as well as pictures, geological information, and incidents of his personal experience.



To Myrl Barnett, Des Moines, and Dr. Jerry Barnett, West Des Moines, who shared with me a Geography textbook dated 1920, which was used in Liberty school at Andersonville. It contains a map and a diagram of mining in Marion County. They also provided much information about the Barnett family.

To Russell Nelson, Dallas, who provided me the use of a copy of Ron Roberts' *Iowa Coal Town* now out of print, as well as being my chief contact person in Melcher-Dallas.

To Bonnie Cowman, Pershing, who lent me old copies of the *Des Moines Register* with articles on Pershing.

To Douglas Wilson, Citrus Heights, California, for including me in a Barnett family tour of the mines in which they had worked.

To Dr. Joyce Huizer, formerly of Central College, now from Knoxville, for scouting out with me some of the coal mine areas in the county, for unearthing various information, and for writing the chapter on her next door neighbor, Tom Wignall.

A special thank you to Laurie Andrews and Nancy Vander Wilt of the Pella Printing Co., Inc. staff. They were a delight to work with and are true craftswomen.

To Alice Carlson and Joyce Huizer for their patient help in proofreading.

To all these people who graciously gave me an interview (some of them, I interviewed three or four times). They provided the human touch needed for my book: Edna Fry Moses, Oskaloosa; Woodrow Geery, Knoxville; Mabel Brady Bausch, Pershing; Winona Davis, Attica; Leona Rowland Allen, Knoxville; Jim and Deborah Kerr, Oskaloosa; Isabella Marshall, Pershing; Albert Sedlock, Pershing; Tillie Pregon, Pershing; Erma Long Darnell, Knoxville; Tom and Ruth Little, Pershing; Lewis Dale Crawford, Knoxville; Mrs. Arthur Nichols, rural Knoxville; and Clyde Conner, Bussey.

Joyce and Gordon Hayes, Knoxville; Robert Barnett, Ankeny; Douglas Barnett, San Diego, California; Lorena Stokes Vander Linden, Springfield, Missouri; Jim Goff, rural Knoxville; Jean Crawford, Knoxville; Orbra Geery, Harvey; Loren Vander Zyl, Pella; Herb Vander Zyl, Newton; Madeline Vander Zyl, Pella; Ranger Dr. Bill Gilbert, Red Rock Visitors' Center (and



Biology Professor, Simpson College); Donna Clarke, Knoxville; Ken Howard, Knoxville, Gene Clark, Albia; Margaret Waechter, Pella; Mrs. Tom Wignall, Knoxville; Bonnie Cowman, Knoxville; Deborah Moses De Vries, Pella; and Dr. Charles Gott, Bloomington, Indiana.

Way back in 1956, I interviewed Tom Wignall, co-owner of Lovilia #3, and Cecil Wilkinson, owner of the Pershing strip mine, and Frank D. Wilkins, Albia, Secretary, District 13 United Mine Workers of America. I used some of the facts learned at that time in this book.

To all those who provided pictures for this book. You are acknowledged in the captions under the pictures.

I have a warm feeling for all of you. You have enriched my life - as well as my knowledge of the intriguing days of coal mining in Marion County.

H.H.

November, 1995



## Part I

# INTRODUCTION TO COAL MINING

If the question were asked, "What are your reactions when you think of coal?" many would answer, "Oh, it's so dirty, so sooty, so dusty, so smoky, it's horrid stuff. I'm glad we don't have to put up with it any more."

Here's a better answer, "It's a gift of God's creation." Like the soil we depend on (which is dirty, too), it is vital to our way of life. Like the soil, it has taken millions of years to form. It is complex, miraculous in its nature, certainly beyond the scope of man's ability to manufacture. The poet Joyce Kilmer said in the last lines of his poem, *Trees*, "Poems are made by fools like me, But only God can make a tree." True. And coal was formed from trees, which lay in tropical swamps in pre-historic times.

Someone has said, "Coal is portable climate." In times past, it enabled man to live in large numbers in places with extremely cold winters (like Iowa). It enabled trains to carry early settlers and goods far into the interior of our country. It brought to mankind the great boon of electricity, with electric lights and many labor-saving devices.

For most of historic times, coal was not considered a resource - for man had not discovered a use for it. When he discovered the wonderful, comforting heat available from coal, a great new industry was born - coal mining.

At first, he dug it out of the sides of hills where it lay near the surface. Older farm family members today remember the days when their parents sent them out to dig up a pailful of coal. The next step in coal mining occurred when farmers operated very small mines right on their farms. They dug it out by hand - "dog holes," they were called - and sold the coal locally.

The ingenuity of man was called into play when it came to getting out the coal which sometimes lay up to 200 feet below the surface. But he did it - he worked out a way to do it, the methods to be described in upcoming chapters.

The hero of this book is the coal miner. The majority of the coal miners are thoroughly knowledgeable about the conditions down there below the surface, more so than many trained geologists. And they are resourceful in solving the unexpected problems they encounter. They may not know



how to conjugate a Latin verb, but they know how to do something the rest of us could not do - get the coal out of the ground for thousands of consumers.

The theme is coal, a gift of Nature, and mankind's effect on it, as well as its influence on mankind.



## Chapter 1

# A THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF COAL MINING IN IOWA AND MARION COUNTY

Coal changed the face and the fortunes of our country. The U.S. was one of the favored countries of the world that had coal reserves. In the 19th and the early 20th centuries the "haves" of the world were those that had coal - England, Germany, Russia, the United States. The "have nots" - South American and African countries - lacked coal.

Appalachia was the first large area in the U. S. to mine its rich deposits of bituminous coal. Second in importance and development were the coal deposits of the Middle West - southern Iowa, and southern Illinois and Indiana.

In Iowa, Polk County was the scene of the first large coal mines. Wesley Redhead organized the Des Moines Coal Company, and other entrepreneurs followed suit and opened other mines in the Des Moines area.

The second large Iowa coal area developed was in southern Iowa in Appanoose and Lucas Counties. In Lucas County (county seat, Chariton), William Haven founded the Whitebreast Fuel Company in the 1880s. Tipperary was the name of the large mining camp associated with those mines. Later this Company developed the pioneer big mines of Marion County at Flagler and Swan. It was a leading company during the last decade of the 19th century.

Coalport, a little town on the Des Moines River, had the distinction of being a very early, if not the earliest, site for coal mining in Marion County. It served as a fueling station for the steamboats that plied the river. More will be said about the role of Coalport in Chapter 3.

### The Role of the Railroads in Coal Mining

An explosion of railroad building across the country after the Civil War (1870-1920) opened up a market for all the coal that could be mined. The railroad companies themselves got into coal production, and became the owners of almost all the big mines. These coal mines became known as "captive mines" - they existed for the railroad. A mutually beneficial relationship developed between railroads and coal mines - each needed each



other. The railroads needed the coal for fuel and for cargo; the coal mines needed the railroads as a market for their coal and as a way to get the coal to other markets.

Since 1890, the leading Iowa coal producers have with a few exceptions been three contiguous counties in the central southeast part of the state - Mahaska, Monroe, and Marion counties - Mahaska County in the 1890s, Monroe County in the first two decades of the 20th century, and Marion County was the leading producer from the 1930s through the 1960s.

### **Ottumwa Coal Palace, 1890-1891**

To celebrate and advertise the importance of coal in this area, business men from several counties erected the fabulous, fantastic Ottumwa Coal Palace that resembled a medieval fortress.

The huge building was veneered with blocks of coal and papier mache that looked like coal. It was brightly decorated on the inside with sheaves of wheat, oats, sorghum, and corn. Nothing was spared to make it a great show place. It featured a 200-foot tower with a dance floor 50 feet from the top of the tower, a 30-foot wide waterfall, and a solarium of tropical plants. It was intended as a place for large meetings, with an auditorium of 6,000 seats and a stage where concerts, plays, and operas were performed.



(State Historical Society, Des Moines)

**Ottumwa Coal Palace, 1890-91**



It also included a functioning reconstruction of an underground coal mine. Visitors descended 150 feet down a dark shaft where Maud the mule pulled a pit car, and grimy men picked away at the coal seam by the dim light of their carbide lamps.

The Coal Palace was opened September, 15, 1890, for a period of 22 days. U.S. President Benjamin Harrison gave the address for the opening. He said, "If I should attempt to interpret the lesson of this structure, I would say it is an illustration of how much that is artistic and graceful is to be found in the common things of life."

The next year, the building was remodeled and reconditioned for its reopening on September 15, 1891. On September 23, Congressman William McKinley spoke to the 30,000 people present. He would become U.S. President five years later. Grand as it was, the Coal Palace was used only for these two expositions and then it was torn down as planned. It had told the world that this south central part of Iowa was rich in coal, and that southern Iowans were ecstatic about it. (Wapello County Historical Society, Ottumwa, 1989).

### **Changes and Problems Coal Mining Effected on Marion County**

The latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century brought significant upheaval to southern Marion County, to a people rather laid back in their outlook, living and working on a land somewhat marginal in fertility. They farmed small acreages of 80 acres or less (large when compared to farms in Europe).

Sheep and a few cattle roamed the dissected hillsides of the southeastern part of the County, and wheat and corn were grown in the more level spots. Rural Marion County people pretty much produced what they needed for subsistence - meat and milk and eggs and flour as well as apples and other fruits from their orchards and wood for fuel. The forested areas provided game and wild fruits. The many creeks abounded in fish.

At the turn of the century, exploiting for coal in Southern Marion County began, and the area was struck by a thunderbolt-like influx of coal miners of diverse ethnic groups many of them from southern and eastern Europe - Italians, Rumanians, Croats, Czechs, whose languages the locals could not understand. Likewise many came from the British Isles - poverty stricken Welsh and Irish, and Englishmen who didn't speak the language "quite right," and who were aloof and condescending.



To farmers, coal mining was a way of life considered less honorable than farming. It was a way of life often ruled by the "Company," and loss of personal freedom has always raised the hackles of farmers. Some referred to the coal miners as "underground savages," not realizing the complexity of coal mining, an occupation that called for a great deal of intelligence and skill.

Population patterns within Marion County changed. Areas with sparse population suddenly became much more heavily populated. A new type of settlement, the mining camp, came into existence. The number of new school-age children far exceeded what the existing schools could accommodate or finance. Roads had to be built or improved to connect with these mining camps.

The influx of the coal miners did not mean the exit of the farmers. They continued on pretty much as usual. There were suddenly two levels of land use. While the coal miners were working as much as 200 feet underground, the farmers were planting and harvesting their grains right above the place the miners were working. Little social mixing of the new people and the the agriculturists occurred; each gravitated to its "own" people when work was done for the day.

### **The Role of the Three-County area - Mahaska, Monroe, and Marion Counties - in Iowa Coal Mining.**

Monroe County on Marion's south border and Mahaska County on its east side were both fabulous coal producers before Marion became important.

Mahaska was the leading coal mining county in Iowa in the 1890s ; the town of Beacon and the mining camps of Muchakinock or "Muchy" and Evans and others were bustling centers with large populations, now gone forever.

Monroe was the number one county in coal production in Iowa from the turn of the century into the 1920s. When the Mahaska coal mines at Muchakinock were mined out by the Consolidation Coal Company, they moved to Monroe County, and opened one fabulous mine after another. Buxton became a mining camp of 6,000 people or more. It was the largest coal mining camp Iowa has ever known; in fact, it was the largest coal mining camp west of the Mississippi River. The mines closed abruptly in 1927. Today, Buxton no longer exists except in the minds of its former residents.



Meanwhile Marion County, though underlain with very good coal, had lagged behind in coal production, seemingly due to poor transportation facilities. According to the State Geological Survey published in 1908:

"The rough topography of (Southeastern ) Marion County favored the coal industry in that it afforded an easy means of locating and reaching coal beds exposed in the valleys beneath the surface materials, but hindered it by checking the building of railroads except along a few rather circumscribed lines of travel."

(Iowa Geological Survey, 1908, p. 181).

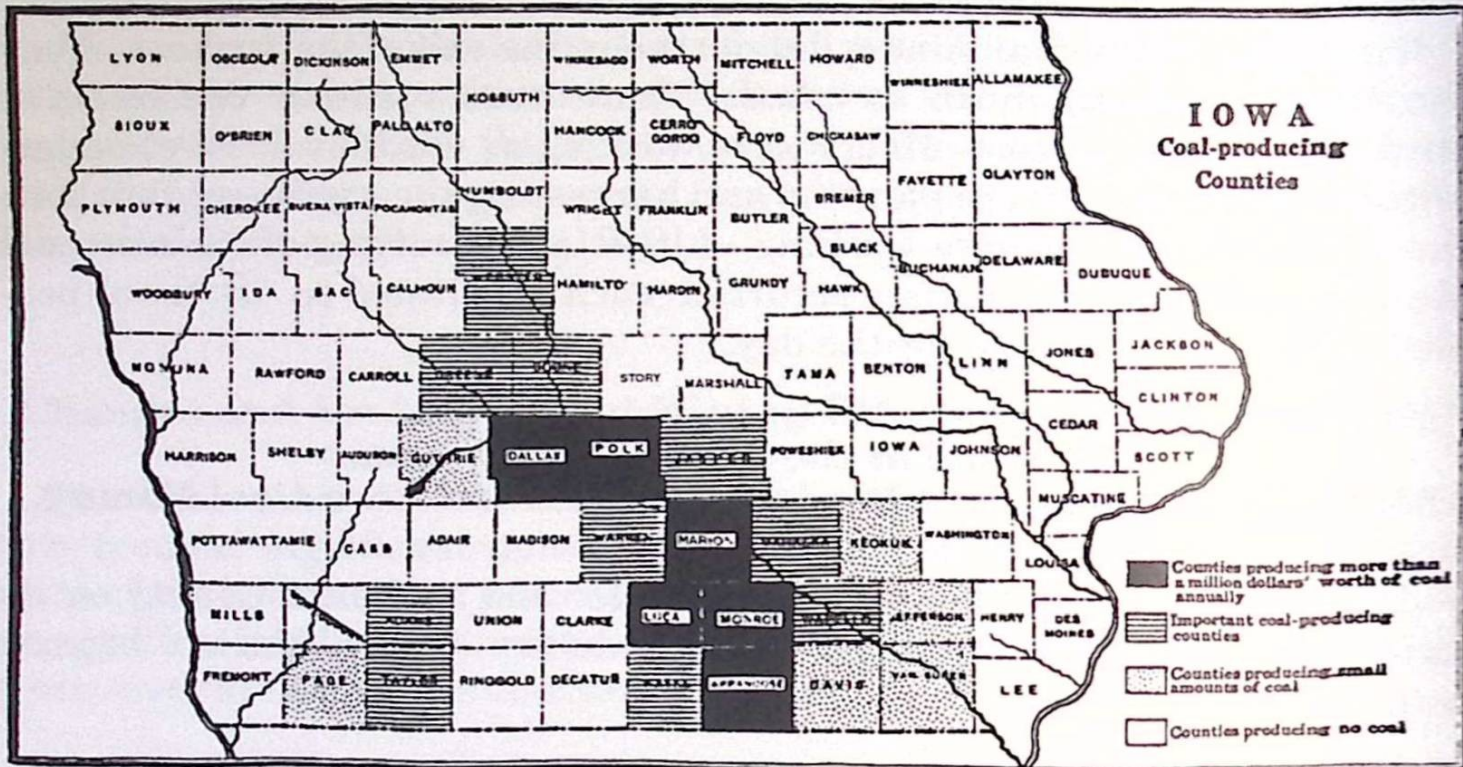


FIG. 5. Map showing parts of Iowa where coal is mined. Why does it not pay to mine it in some places ?

(Myrl Barnett)

Coal Producing Counties in Iowa.  
(from a 1920 Liberty School Geography textbook)

Nonetheless, Marion County was the next and last county to become Number 1 in Iowa in mining. The new center of coal production was Liberty Township in Marion County, just six miles from old Buxton. In this six square miles, 123 coal mines (1/4 of the coal mines in Marion County) were worked throughout the years - most of them small, some large. The Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company opened one large underground mine after another in the latter part of the 1890s and the first years of this century. Everist, its mining camp, was a bustling place.



Eventually, the Pershing Fuel Company mines in Knoxville Township, a few miles northwest of the Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company's mines, eclipsed all other Marion County coal mines. In the course of its history, the Pershing Fuel Company operated two giant shaft mines, #12 from 1919 until 1938, and #14 from 1938 to 1947 - the largest in Marion County, and often leading all other mines in the State.

Finally, strip mining replaced underground mining throughout the area. The Sinclair strip mine (later called Wilkinson mine) between Pershing and Tracy operated from 1949 to 1963. It was the largest strip mine not only in Marion County but also in the State of Iowa.

Many other mines contributed to Marion County's coal mining supremacy. The Golden Goose near Hamilton (Liberty Township) was a highly productive mine which owed much of its success to the fact that two railroads laid their lines right through that area - the Wabash and the Burlington.

Reasons for the decline and eventual cessation of coal mining are given as: loss of market when cars and trucks supplanted the railroads; use of Eastern coal which, though more expensive, was cleaner for household use; and the use of oil and gas for household heating. Closely associated with these economic and technological reasons were human reasons such as labor demands for higher wages and better safety precautions, which when not granted, led to costly strikes - costly both to labor and owners of the mines.

For all practical purposes, coal mining was almost over in Iowa when the Pershing strip mine closed in 1963, but strip mining continued on a small scale in other areas until 1995.

According to the Des Moines Register, May 28, 1995,

"With the closing of the American Coal Company's strip mine near Knoxville (Marion County), coal mining is over in Iowa, even though there is a great deal of coal remaining beneath Iowa. I think this is the first time since the 1880s when there was absolutely no coal mining in Iowa," said Mary Howes, a research geologist for the Department of Natural Resources. "It's pretty amazing."



## Chapter 2

# WHY COAL BEDS IN MARION COUNTY?

### A Little Lesson in Geology

For an Iowan moving from the northwest part of the State (Sioux County) to southern Iowa in the 1940s, it was an amazing experience to discover coal mines in Marion and neighboring counties. My question was, "Why were there coal beds here and not in my home part of the state?"

Several geological occurrences through time account for the coal and coal mining in Marion County:

1. Believe it or not - About 600 millions years ago, the North American continent was much farther south than it is today - so far south that the Equator passed through southern Canada. That put Iowa much closer to the equator than it is presently, and this meant that the temperatures here in Iowa at that time were tropical, and tropical types of trees grew in Iowa.

2. In that time when there were tropical temperatures here, a shallow sea known as the *Pennsylvanian Sea* covered the land - that was about 300 million years ago. The tropical trees stood in the water and decayed and fell into the vast seas and swamps. As the warm waters covered the trees, their carbon rich remains were preserved as coal. Shellfish and other fish floated in the waters in the shallower parts of the sea, and have today become the limestone fossils we find if we bother to look for them.

3. When the land rose, and the *Pennsylvanian Sea* receded, it left behind thousands of feet of particles - sand, silt, salts, limy remains of sea animals - and this carbonized plant life. Through time, those deposits hardened into layers of sandstone, shale, limestone, and where the carbonized plant life had been, there was coal. These sedimentary rocks became the bedrock of south central Iowa.

Northern Iowa never produced any coal because it was covered several times with seas after the *Pennsylvanian* (the last sea in northern Iowa was the *Cretaceous*), and the coal layers were covered with such a deep layer of sediments that there would be no possibility of mining it.

4. Ever so slowly, the North American continent moved northward to its present position. The Equator today passes through South America instead of Canada. North America is now very cold in winter. In its most



northern reaches, thick layers of ice, glaciers, formed when the temperatures were not warm enough to melt the winter snow. After many, many thousands of years, these glaciers began to move southward. In doing so, they ground down some of the highlands of Canada and even northern Minnesota and those loose materials froze into the bottom of the moving body of ice.

Finally the glaciers had moved so far south that they began to melt and had to drop some of the materials which had frozen into the bottom of the glacier. These loose materials were deposited on top of the bedrock, and they became the surface materials of our earth.

5. But there is yet another geological factor which had much to do with coal mining. The last glacier to leave its mineral rich deposits on Marion County was the Kansas Glacier, a very ancient glacier. Later, three or four other glaciers came into Iowa, but not as far south as Marion County.

For a great span of geological time, therefore, the Marion County area lay exposed to wind and water and it became severely eroded - while Northern Iowa still lay under a glacier for thousands of years more. Meanwhile in southern Iowa, rains fell and snows melted, and the water formed gullies and ran off the land. Gullies dissected the land and developed into creeks. Southern Iowa is a land of creeks and gullies and dissected hills.

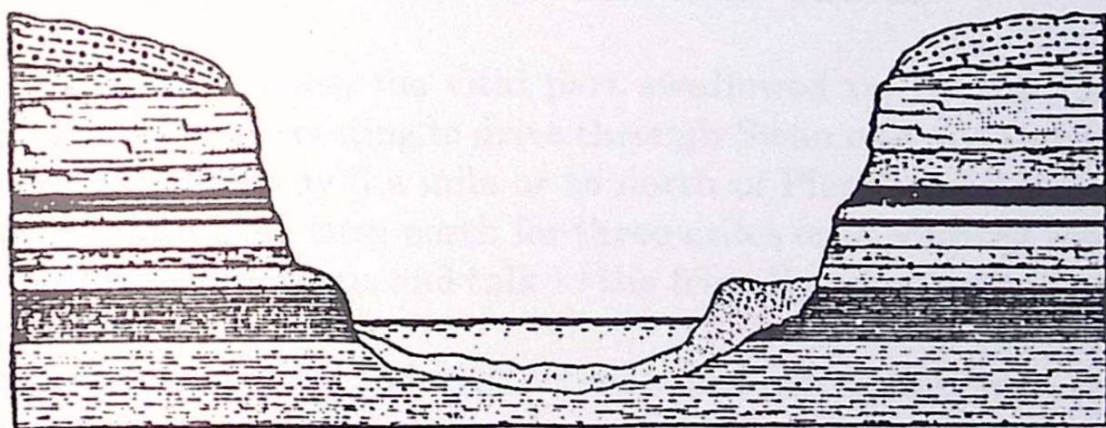


FIG. 6. The Des Moines River in Marion County has cut through a coal seam, exposing the edges of the seam in the valley walls. In a place such as this it was easy for men to find coal

(Myrl Barnett)

Diagram showing coal and other rock layers in Marion County.  
(from a 1920 Liberty School Geography textbook)



As the streams cut into the land, they exposed some of the coal deposits and made them more easily accessible. As any alert observer will note, coal outcrops may be seen along road cuts in many places in the county. Coal mining was successful in Marion County in those parts with the most dissected landscape.

6. Our earth is ever changing. A process of recent origin (geologically speaking) is the formation of *faults*. A fault is a break in the underlying rocks which, because of pressures within the earth, leads to displacement of a section of the earth upward or downward - a process similar to that caused by an earthquake.

The layers of rock caused by the sedimentation of the ancient seas are no longer continuous - all layers of the rock are raised or lowered many feet at the point of the break. Because of the discontinuity in the layers, the coal layer runs into a wall of another type of rock - and that's the end of mining coal in that place. Two principal faults in Marion County are (1) the Anderson Fault and (2) the Whitebreast Fault. Their effects on coal mining will be noted later.



## Part II

### EARLIEST MINES

In this section, you will learn about coal mining towns you perhaps didn't know had ever existed. Yet, people of another generation walked the streets, attended school, went to church, dug into the earth for coal, probably had their beer afterwards, married and had children, laughed and cried, lived and died in these towns.

Those who have the persistence to walk and poke around are likely to see some evidences of mining and other activities in these towns which have almost disappeared. A lively imagination helps to fill in the blanks.

One can find only a bit of Coalport today. Most of the once busy town now lies under Lake Red Rock, which was formed in 1969. Higher up, above the level of the lake, however, are sites where Coalport people farmed. Today, one can visit those former farm sites while walking the Stu Kuyper Trails (entrance across the road north of the Church and about a quarter of a mile to the east). Coalport farms also covered Whitebreast Park, now given over to beaches and camp grounds.

The Coal Ridge Baptist Church is the only surviving building. Formerly, there was a rural school right across the road to the north, but it "bit the dust" when the rural school system was swallowed up into consolidated schools. Turn north off T15 between Pella and Knoxville on S71 for several miles and you will see the Coal Ridge Church.

Half of Swan survives, the vital part swallowed up by the Lake Red Rock Project. It is interesting to drive through Swan and see the part that remains. Take Highway 5 a mile or so north of Pleasantville, and when you see the Swan sign, turn north for three miles on a country road. One can see homes and gardens and talk to the friendly people who live there.

Morgan Valley is north and west of Swan, but across the river, therefore hard to get at, not on the Iowa or Marion county maps anymore. Ask for information in Swan. It's hard to imagine the railroad passing right through the little town, and mule carts filled with coal moving to the railroad loading place. Now there are new little homes, especially mobile homes. It's a beautiful view of the Des Moines River.

Flagler is about five miles east from Knoxville, off T 15 and to the right. It is on two levels. Be sure to drive through both levels. From the lower



level, one can see the Burlington railroad, which did so much to promote coal mining in the Flagler area. In the upper level is the Clarke home, only surviving residence of the old time coal mine operators.



## Chapter 3

# FLAGLER AND OTHER EARLY MINING TOWNS

When the first settlers came into Marion County from 1843 on, they came with the intention of becoming farmers. They did not realize that the land had another rich resource - that of coal. Maybe a few of those who came through saw evidences of coal jutting out from the hillsides, though even that is unlikely. Most of the coal one sees today is in road cuts, where man has exposed it by cutting into the hills.

When the coal was first exploited in a large way, it was in most cases done by the railroads, who were covetous for coal to fuel their engines as well as coal for an item of freight. Wood from the many trees was still being used for home heating.

Coal was mined in the latter part of the 19th century in such places as Coalport, Swan, and Morgan Valley, and especially, and on a really large scale, in Flagler. Because the first three were once important in coal mining, they will be discussed briefly. The main focus in this chapter, however, is on Flagler, the first large, organized mine in the County.

### Coalport

Coalport's history is unlike that of any other coal mining town in the area. This town, platted in 1857, was located on the south side of the Des Moines River on a big meander of the river. It served a little community of farmers. Its pioneer inhabitants also dug coal out of the bluffs lining the river and sold it to the passing steamboats, which had previously been using wood for fuel. In fact, Coalport became the most important coaling station between Eddyville and Des Moines. As such, it was also a landing place for loading and unloading goods to and from Keokuk, and it became a prosperous little distributing center for the surrounding area.

Associated with the coal formation were large deposits of clay good for making pottery, and William Welch opened a pottery and became known in a large surrounding area for his fine bowls, crocks and dishes.

The steamboats stopped running in 1869, but coal mining continued in Coalport on a small scale. The coal was hauled by wagon to Pella and Knoxville for home heating, and some of it even to Howell Station for shipment by railroad until about 1919.





(Iva Miedema)  
Cal and Perry Evans, Coalport,  
with river catfish, c. 1888.

The business and residential section of Coalport was swallowed up by Lake Red Rock. All that remains is the Coal Ridge Baptist Church, one of the finest examples of an old-time country church. Today it holds church services for summer campers at Lake Red Rock, and it is in the process of becoming a church museum. Its mission in the world has changed.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)  
Coal Ridge Church, Coalport.



## Swan

Swan, located in the extreme northwest part of the county was platted in 1879 by the Burlington railroad. Settlers from the East had entered the area already in 1874 and had become prosperous farmers, raising cattle and horses.

Obviously, the Burlington was interested in the coal lands. Three coal companies prospected the area and found that it had abundant coal of high quality. Hopes for success in mining were high, and 600 miners came in to work the mines. Swan became the largest mining center in the county as well as a leading business and school center. It was spoken of as a rip-roaring, rowdy town with many taverns.

Success was short-lived. A fatal flaw existed as far as mining was concerned. Water flooded the mines, and the situation seemingly could not be controlled. It was suggested that the shafts had been sunk in the wrong location, at a place which could not be drained.

Already in the early 1900s, coal mining was abandoned, the miners left town, and it started to decline in population, and businesses closed their doors.

In 1922, enterprising Swan citizens formed a company to prospect for coal once again. They would sink a new shaft in the right location. However, nothing developed of this ambitious plan. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.* 4/22/22)

When Lake Red Rock was formed in 1969, it swallowed up half of the town. Only a few people live there now - there is no school or church or business place in Swan.

## Morgan Valley

One of the most beautiful spots along the Des Moines River is the once bustling coal town of Morgan Valley. It is tucked up in the northwest corner of the County, just across the line from Polk County. The Wabash Railroad was interested in developing the coal of the area. Tracks were laid right through the town and a depot was constructed. Spur tracks led off to several mining areas.

It seemed that Morgan Valley was to be a permanent entity. It had stores, a school, a church, even a brick plant, and a post office (from 1891 to 1903). (The latter date hints a decline in population.)



But the accessible coal did not last forever. When it was worked out, the population moved away. All signs of habitation disappeared except the Morgan Valley Christian Church. On September 11, 1988, the last service was held in this church after 90 years of use.

Today (1995), houses are again sprouting up in this beautiful area. It is being revived, this time as a bedroom town whose residents find work in Des Moines. It is pleasant to live here - rents are cheaper and the area is less crowded than Des Moines. Hopefully, the new people will be interested in Morgan Valley's coal mining heritage.

## FLAGLER, PIONEER MINING TOWN

Flagler, a little village of about 70 people located five miles east of Knoxville on T15, is scenically the prettiest little village of all the ex-coal mining places in this county. Its heavy growth of trees shuts off its view from the road, and its rather steep hills is the reason for its two levels of settlement. Some attractive homes with well kept lawns are also part of the pleasant picture. It is also true that others of the homes are very modest, and in places the yards are littered with machinery and rubble. The latter is what often happens when a town is unincorporated, and there is no pressure for community upkeep and beautification.

A few farming families came into the area by 1870 and raised crops and livestock. They must have noticed the black outcrops of coal here and there in their hilly lands and must have been aware of the fact that the land was perhaps more suitable for mining than for farming. Just a mile to the east, the Union Coal Company operated a small mine, its workers living in a mining camp called Cobalt.

Good news for the small settlement in 1885 was that a railroad was to be routed through their area on its way to Knoxville - the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy (popularly called the Burlington - or the "Q").

When the railroad appeared, the Union Coal Company moved in from Cobalt and with an investment of \$12,000 opened two slope mines #5 and #6. (A slope mine is an underground mine entered through the side of a hill rather than by vertical shaft - mules pull the coal cars up the slope and out of the mine.) They called the settlement Flaglers, the name of the mine superintendent. Later the "s" was dropped, and it became Flagler. The Union Coal Company mines of Flagler became the first railroad or shipping mines in Marion County.



Emigrants from England, Scotland and a small group from France came in to swell the work force. It was said that those from France were looked down upon as being of a lower class.

The Union Coal Company furnished housing for some of the early miners. Mrs. Grace Cronkhite Karr says of early Flagler, "I was born April 13, 1899, on a farm southwest of old Flagler at Shaft #3. At that time, it was a thriving coal town, and there were rows and rows of miners' homes all alike across the road from our house. (*Pella Chronicle, Cordova News*, 4/3/61)

The workers lived in poverty and, it was said, some of them practically subsisted on lard sandwiches. Those who were farmers and also worked in the mines were the fortunate ones because they could supplement their wages by produce from the farm.

The miners were hard workers and worked from before daylight until late in the day. They walked to and from work with lard-oil or carbide lamps fastened on their caps and swinging tin dinner pails on their arms. Many of them had started in the mines at the age of 8, 12, or 14 years.

At that time, legislation had not been passed prohibiting young children from working in the mines. Nor were there laws requiring safety measures and better living conditions for the mines or legislation specifying minimum daily wages or number of hours worked per day.

The Flagler miners joined the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in about 1897. They hoped that conditions would improve.

The Union Coal Company #5 was for years recognized as one of the greatest mines in Iowa with a coal seam of eight to nine feet in thickness. It employed 40 to 50 people and produced about 150 tons of coal daily.

After a few years (1888), the Whitebreast Fuel Company took over the Union Coal Company.

Besides this one large mighty mine, there were smaller mines - the Thomas Clarke Mine (Clarke was an early farmer), the Oak Hill, Knoxville Coal Company, Fortners and other mines were opened, resulting in rapid growth in population. It is estimated there were at least 1,000 people in Flagler in the early 1900s.



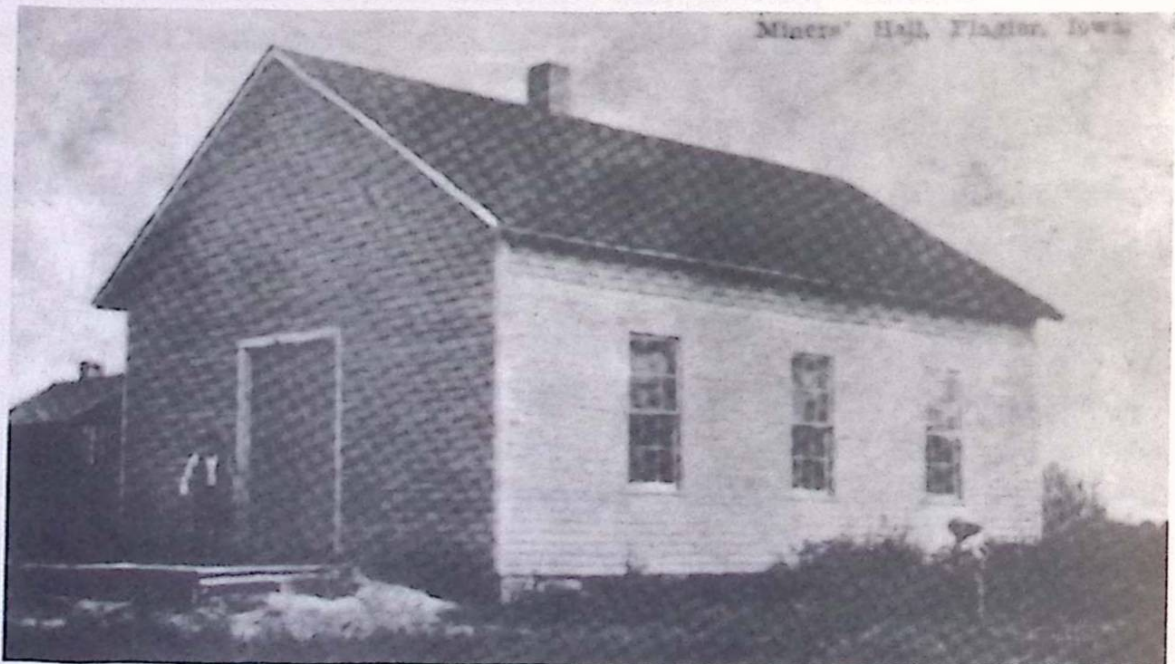
The original town, which consisted of five blocks, was enlarged by various additions - Conwell's addition (1887), ten blocks; First addition (1888), four blocks; Booth's addition (1888), two blocks; and an addition by C. F. Stevens of 30 lots. Flagler covered a large expanse of land.

Early Flagler had a Company store and another which was privately owned, a post office (before its coming, it was necessary to make the five-mile trip into Knoxville for mail), a Methodist and a Latter Day Saints Church, and a dance hall which was popular with people even as far away as Knoxville. Music was provided by the local Hayes boys. The local baseball team attracted loyal fans as it was known as a winning team.

A school for the children was a matter of grave concern. The incoming children were assigned to rural schools - to English Creek (later known as South Flagler), others to Sumpter School (later known as North Flagler) and all were overcrowded.

In 1877, a fund drive was started for a school building in Flagler. The first donation was a handsome \$25 by Dan Wilcox, and other donations followed. Land was also donated for the building. Additional funds were raised by having entertainments and festivals. A temporary "schoolhouse on the hill" was built. Eleven years later (1888), it became possible to build a three-room school house. One hundred and thirty-five students were enrolled in grades 1 through 8.

The "school on the hill" was used for years for Sunday School services, and later it became the Miners' Hall.



(Donna Clarke)

Miners' Hall, originally the schoolhouse



A unique feature in Flagler was an artesian well, which caused much interest and excitement. It was hoped that it would bring economic gain to Flagler. Although people came for miles to fill their jugs with the healthy mineral water that flowed out of the ground, it was never a financial success. Flaglerites still point to its location.

One of Marion County's most tragic mine accidents occurred in 1914 in the small Fortner mine 1/2 mile south of Flagler. An explosion and terrible fire were caused when a faulty shot of blasting powder ignited the floating particles of coal dust in the air. All eight men in the mine were blown a distance of 50 or 60 feet into the air and out of the mouth of the mine. Three were killed instantly, and the others were seriously injured.

Especially well known were two Clarke brothers, Will, who was killed instantly and Ernest, who suffered two broken legs and serious burns on his head and face. He was sent to a Des Moines hospital. Their father was Thomas Clarke, prominent early settler and mine owner. Carl Fortner, 17-year old son of the proprietor of the mine, also went to the hospital with serious burns and broken bones. Ironically, the accident occurred just as the men were leaving the mine at the end of the day. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.* 12/30/14)

By 1914 the coal beds were worked out and the town started to fade away. From a peak of 1,000 in its earliest years, it had only 200 people by 1914. The store was torn down in 1933, the Miners' Hall in 1965. The old schoolhouse was torn down and is incorporated in an apartment building in Knoxville on the corner of E. Marion and Roche.

Today Flagler numbers about 70 people living in 20 houses. The town has no business places, or a church or a school; its people commute to other towns to work, chiefly to Knoxville, a short commute of only about five miles.

Only one family remains who are descendants of early inhabitants of Flagler. They are the descendants of Thomas W. and Elizabeth Clarke, originally from England who came to America to work in the Excelsior mines in Mahaska County, then moved to Flagler. Eventually Thomas opened his own mine, known as the Clarke mine. Thomas worked nights building his home, using the light from his carbide lamp. This house remains and the family call it the "little house." It is on the premises of the big house which the Clarkes built later.

Grandson Irl Clarke, Jr. lives in the "little house" today. Kathy Clarke,



great granddaughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Clark lives in a trailer home in Flagler. Thomas L. Clarke, grandson of Thomas and Elizabeth, and family lived in the "big house" until 1993, when they sold it out of the family. They now live in Knoxville.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Old Clarke home, Flagler

It is inexpensive to live in Flagler. The setting is hilly, and it is beautiful with its winding roads and its many trees. The Burlington Railroad, once so busy carrying coal, still skirts the town, but the trains do not stop. However, they are a reminder of Flagler's historic coal mining days.

For a long time nostalgic feelings concerning the old town persisted. Reunions were held in the old schoolhouse from 1936 with 300 present, until 1962. Another reunion was held in 1990. But, of course, as time goes on fewer and fewer people remember old Flagler.

P.S. In the 1930s and 1940s something of a revival occurred! Some of the old Flagler mine areas including the Clarke mine were stripped. The Dunreath mine (owned by Ben McConville), which operated and reworked the old Flagler mines, proved to be the most productive mine in the county.



## Part III

### FARMING SETTLEMENTS BECAME COAL TOWNS

The three chapters in this section are devoted to Dunreath, Melcher-Dallas, and Harvey. These towns had a varied economic background, all having started out as service towns for the surrounding farming area. Dunreath is the only one of the three not listed by name on Iowa or Marion County maps.

Dunreath may be found by turning west (right) off Highway 14 two miles south of Monroe at Carpenter Street. Continue on Carpenter Street for four miles, then turn south (left) on South Place. The cemetery is about 3-1/2 miles from the turn-off at Carpenter Street. It is on the left side of the road.

The cemetery is all that is left of the one-time flourishing town. Its size gives the clue that it must have been a good-sized town. It is interesting to walk through the cemetery as well as to view the farm places all along the road. The whole landscape gives one a feeling of emptiness and of belonging to another time in history.

Melcher-Dallas is easy to find. Take Highway 14, south from Knoxville for about six miles. Turn right on Highway G76 for six or seven miles, turn north (right) at Highway 181 for one mile. Other routes to Melcher-Dallas can be found on an Iowa State Highway map.

In Melcher-Dallas (the Melcher part), one will immediately note the large Miners' Hall on the northwest corner of the Square. The front part is now used as a public library. The north part of the old Miners' Hall is being renovated for a museum. This building is the only Miners' Hall remaining in Marion County, so hopefully it will be carefully maintained. A large coal car once used in the Lovilia #3 mine is displayed in the Square.

One should drive through both towns, Melcher and Dallas, to see the buildings, both old and modern, and perhaps stop in a cafe for coffee and talk to people about the old mining days.

Harvey is east of Knoxville on T15 which runs into Highway 92. Continue for about eight miles, then north (right) on T17 for about one mile. The old schoolhouse in Harvey now houses a budding historical



museum. A coal car is displayed in front of the museum. Out of town to the east is the abandoned Rock Island Railroad bridge and across the bridge is the area known as "The Island" (where the River Rats lived). It is now in large-scale farming. Ask people you see for the location and the story of the Peace Tree.



## Chapter 4

# DUNREATH

Just north of the Des Moines River about 3 miles northwest of the old town of Red Rock was the town of Dunreath. When they became aware that they were on top of coal beds, it led to wild anticipation concerning their expected great riches. It didn't turn out exactly that way, but coal mining was significant and was the reason for the town's initial growth as well as for its demise when the coal ran out.

Before the town came into being, small farms dotted the area. The 1875 Marion County Atlas shows that the farms were 14 acres, 25 acres, 45 acres, nothing as large as 100 acres. The White Walnut rural school, attended by the farmers' children, was already in existence.

In 1881, a land developer by the name of Nathan Towne, "smelled" coal in the area and convinced the Wabash Railroad (at that time its name was the Wabash, St. Louis and Des Moines Railroad) to lay their route to Des Moines through this place. He purchased 4,500 acres for the Wabash, and they laid the tracks and built a depot in this place. The Red Rock Coal and Mining Company (owned by the Wabash) was formed. Obviously, it was another example of the marriage of coal and railroad interests, each being dependent on the other.

In 1882, the town of Dunreath was platted. The Wabash Coal and Mining Company offered lots for sale, and J.C. Casey and John Karr were the first buyers. Several people who lived in Red Rock moved their homes to the new town - W.P. Clark and Taylor Reno among them. William Hammer, the druggist, and Mr. Myers, a lawyer, moved their residences from Red Rock and established themselves in Dunreath. A saloon was built and became a popular hangout, and plans were made for another one. It was said that Dunreath did not equal Red Rock in rowdy behavior, but it did have its share of robberies and saloon fights.

Unlike other coal property owners, the Red Rock Coal and Mining Company did not themselves exploit their lands for coal. Instead, they leased land to those who wanted to mine it. Prospectors began searching for the best sites for coal mining. Those early days were rough and hectic but exciting.

The two largest mines to be opened were the Black Diamond, opened in



1884, and the Success Mines in 1895. Both were slope mines. Mine workers of English, Welsh, Irish, Scottish, and Swedish descent came in from other mines. An example of how miners moved from one mining place to another is given in an item in *The Knoxville Journal*, July 23, 1890.

“W. W. Ryan, the Company blacksmith and one of the diggers, is a native of Ohio and came to Dunreath in 1887. He worked for one year in the Otley Coal Company’s mines.”

By 1885, the town had a population of 214, of which there were 49 coal miners (41 with families and 8 single men) in contrast to only 10 farmers. There was also a butcher, a physician, an attorney, a school teacher, a hotel keeper, a railroad worker, and a telegraph operator.

The *Knoxville Journal*, July 23, 1890, describes the organization of the Black Diamond Mine:

Dunreath is a good mining town. The Black Diamond Coal Company has a paying slope one-half mile east of town. The officers of the Company are as follows: John Walters, president; Isaac Brandt, treasurer; Amos Brandt, Secretary. All these gentlemen reside in Des Moines and are engaged in other lines of business. Mr. Walters also had the personal superintendency of the mines. The slope is about 500 yards in length and has been worked for nearly five years. The company usually employs a force of about fifty men. They supply the local demand for coal and likewise for the Wabash Railroad, which has extensive coal chutes there.

In the 1890s, the population numbered 435. Ninety-three students were enrolled in the White Walnut School. Fortunately for the teacher, Mr. John Cochran, who commuted - likely on horseback - from the little nearby town of Percy, there were never 93 students at any one time. The coal miners’ older children attended only in the spring because they worked in the mines during fall and winter, and the farmers’ older children came only in winter because they had to help with the spring planting and the fall harvesting.

Despite the fact that the number of miners during the 1880s and 1890s fluctuated around 50, Dunreath was not a mining camp. The Company did not provide miners’ housing. Perhaps the miners’ situation would have been better under company management of their lives. Temporary



shacks and tents dotted the hillsides at times. Permanent residents took boarders into their homes (according to 1895 Census figures, one to two boarders in a household was the norm, although some households had more). People established boarding houses as an additional source of income for their families.

Dunreath's best days didn't last long. By 1900, coal mining had reached its peak although it reached minor peaks in later years - at the time of World War I when demand was high and a lesser peak in the 1940s when old mines were being opened up and mined by strip mining methods. However, population continued to increase during the early years of the 1900s. Old residents contend that it was at least 1,000 - demographers say this may have been true between census periods when there were influxes of miners. The cemetery at Dunreath, the only surviving feature of the town today, is of considerable size and could bear out the contention that Dunreath numbered 1,000.

A very productive shaft mine which operated from 1901 until 1925 was that of Dunreath Coal Company - which was referred to locally, however, as the Findley mine. The Wabash ran a spur track to this mine located about five miles northeast of Dunreath. The Findleys, who were Percy people, operated a boarding house for the miners.

Evidently the Wabash did not consider these coal lands a good investment. It was said that a good amount of coal was there but that it was in discontinuous beds, which would require too many mine openings to make it profitable to mine it. In 1911, to everyone's amazement, the Wabash sold all their Dunreath area lands to a wealthy farmer, J.W. LeGrand, who already had considerable land holdings, and after this transaction owned over 5,000 acres in Red Rock Township. The sale included the land between the Wabash tracks and the Des Moines River and more.

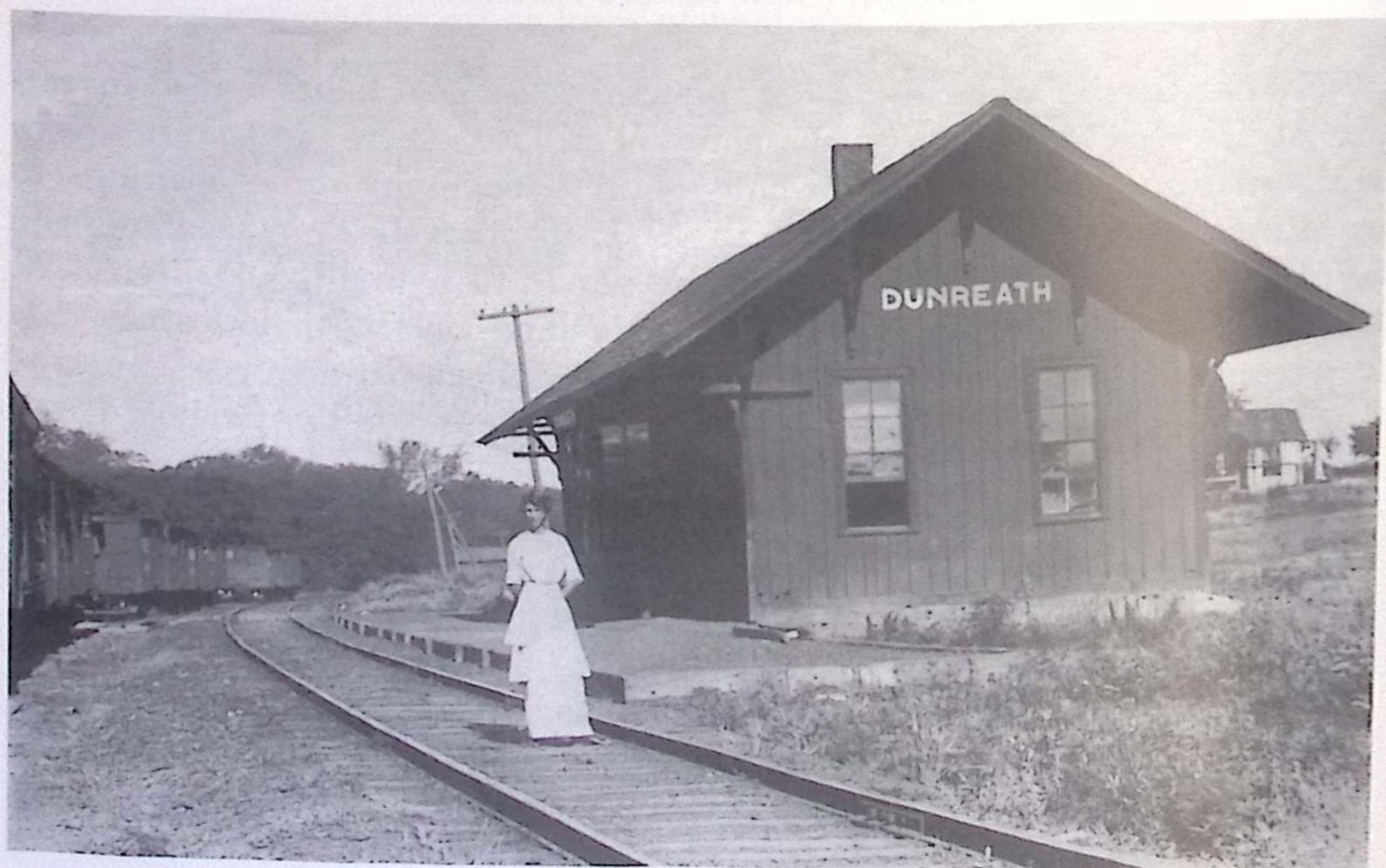
Disposing of their Dunreath land to LeGrand was certainly not a bad business deal for the Wabash. LeGrand and his three sons were livestock farmers and maintained big cattle pastures and feedlots. They shipped out hundreds of cattle to market each spring. They shipped not just one carload at a time (which would have been a big shipment), but often a big trainload of 18 to 20 cars. J.W. LeGrand also owned a 30,000-acre cattle ranch in Nebraska. Cattle from the Nebraska ranch were shipped to Dunreath for fattening in Iowa. It was the largest farming venture in Marion County.



The Red Rock Coal and Mining Company had owned the town; the new owner was the LeGrand family. Dunreath was the center for their cattle business. Naturally, furnishing the needed supplies for the LeGrand activities brought prosperity to the stores and other business establishments. The LeGrands themselves lived in the vicinity of Monroe, but their workers lived in various little houses on the land.

Nor were coal shipments a thing of the past for the Wabash. Mining operations continued in various small neighboring mines though at a much lesser rate than at the last part of the nineteenth century.

Particularly significant for the Wabash was the opening of the big mine at Pershing in 1919, much the largest in the County. The Wabash had laid a spur connecting the Pershing mine with their line which went from Tracy to Des Moines. Special morning and afternoon coal trains from Tracy roared through Dunreath carrying coal to Iowa Power and Light Company in Des Moines. The Dunreath depot hired their own section crew which maintained the rails and bridges and arranged for big shipments. Among the long-time workers in the section crew were Sam Nichols, who worked for 19 years, and his three brothers, Arthur, Carl (Bean), and Hobart (Buck).



(Ruth Hart Perkey)

Dunreath depot. Tene Hening on tracks.





(Mrs. Arthur Nichols)

Lucy Nichols with children Madge, Hobart, and baby Arthur in front of her Dunreath home, c. 1913.

Then, alas, came the Great Depression of the 1930s. LeGrands, like many other farmers, lost most of their extensive holdings by foreclosure. In the summer of 1931, J.W. LeGrand, Jr., while returning from a business trip to his Nebraska ranch, contracted pneumonia, which was exacerbated by having to change a flat tire along the way. His painful illness, together with his state of depression led him to hang himself. He had just before arranged for the purchase of 1,200 cattle. His brother returned from Texas, bringing those cattle which would be fattened in Iowa.

However, with J.W. LeGrand's death, the LeGrand empire was ended. And, as a result, the town had lost much of its financial and employment support.

The new owners listed on the land plats following foreclosures were Aetna Life Insurance Company, Bankers' Trust Company, Connecticut Mutual, and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.

The town gradually faded away in the 1930s. Coal mining came to a standstill, which was the main reason for the town's decline. As the old-time coal men said, "When the digging stopped, so did the town." The last store to close was Carey's. It was a store that had carried everything - bread, which came every day on the 5 a.m. train from Des Moines, canned goods, shoes, boots and underwear, caskets (displayed on the second floor), and corsets, and everything else imaginable.





(Mrs. Arthur Nichols)

Carey's Store, the last store in Dunreath to close. R-L Pete Carey, Jimmy Carey, and two friends.

The closing of the depot was almost a fatal blow. Except for the few of the railroad section crew, most of the people moved away. Dunreath ceased to exist as a town in the 1940s.

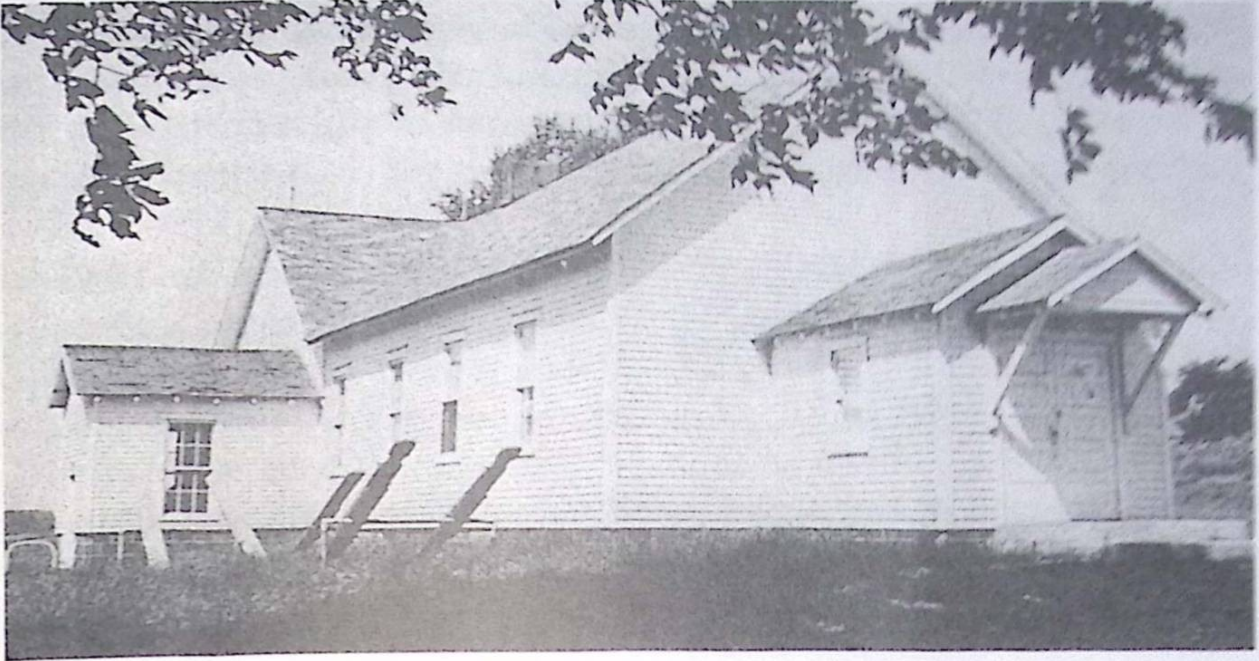
Something of a resurgence of coal mining, however, occurred when strip mining methods came into use, and old underground mines were being reworked by stripping in the late 1930s. Good neighbor Grace Karr from Cordova describes a couple of these strip mines in her weekly newspaper column in the *Pella Chronicle*.

June 3, 1938. The strip pit near Dunreath is making things hum. They loaded one carload of coal last week. They claim there's enough coal to keep them busy for three years, and the vein is 11 feet deep in places.

October 12, 1939. The McConville Coal Company (from Centerville) uncovered the old Dunreath mine that was worked 50 or 60 years ago. The props were still there, and even some of the tracks of the men, some of whom are now dead. The vein of coal is 8 feet deep. The Company has secured a contract from the State of Iowa for 55,000 tons at the price of a dollar and some cents per ton loaded on cars.



None of the various stripping operations were enough to *revitalize the town*. However, they do represent the new trend in coal production, *which* later completely replaced the old underground mining techniques.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

White Walnut School, 1870s - a two-room school. Later one room used for Latter Day Saints' Church Services.

The White Walnut School continued in operation in one of its two rooms (one room was adequate with the decline in population), and the other room served as the meeting place for the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints. It was abandoned as a school when in the latter 1950s the State of Iowa consolidated all rural schools into the town systems. When the U.S. Government confiscated the land for the Red Rock Lake project in the 1960s, the building was sold, moved away, and remodeled as a dwelling.

Also, as part of the Red Rock Lake project, the railroad tracks were picked up, and the Wabash was rerouted south of the Des Moines River and renamed the Norfolk and Western. All that had been the reason for Dunreath's existence was now gone. The land that was once Dunreath is again in farming as it was before mining and railroading were dominant.

Today, nothing is left at Dunreath except the large well-kept cemetery, which is still being used. Perhaps it could be said that it symbolizes a once living coal mining-railroad community and a way of life that is gone forever.



## Chapter 5

# MELCHER-DALLAS

Melcher-Dallas, an area of rich coal deposits in the southwestern part of the county has the historic distinction of being a "tale of two cities." It also has the historic distinction of being one of the giants of coal mining in Marion County. The story of coal mining and of the two towns, which later became one are closely intertwined.

Dallas was on the scene first. Its beginnings date back to 1845 when settlers who came, many of them from Ohio, laid out a town and called it Little Ohio. It was incorporated and before long boasted a post office, a general store, two blacksmith shops, a school house, and a Methodist Church. It served the farmers of the surrounding area with goods and services as well as providing them with educational and religious opportunities. It seemed that serving the farmers of the area would forever be the function of this little town.

About 1910, the scene changed mightily. News had it that the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad (usually referred to as the Rock Island) had plans to build a branch from Allerton, Iowa, to Des Moines via Dallas. What welcome news! The coal of the area would henceforth be accessible to national markets.

Unfortunately, however, the railroad company deemed Dallas's slightly rough terrain as an unsuitable place to build a depot and the necessary switches. Just south of the town, the land was flatter and thus more favorable for those installations. The new spot was the strategic location for a town and Melcher was born.

The Melcher depot was finished in 1914. Meanwhile, the Rock Island Railroad purchased about 5,000 acres of land two miles south of Melcher and sunk their first Consolidated Indiana Coal Company Mine here. The railroad-coal mining combination, as was true in so many other places, was like a magnet in drawing laborers looking for jobs. Men who had worked in nearby mines until they had closed down, Italians, Croatians, and other immigrants crowded into the new coal mining camp named Electra, and shacks and tents sprang up. Electra was on a hill east of the mine and consisted of several short streets. Before long, however, the majority of the miners moved to the town of Melcher, and the mining camp withered away.



Melcher grew and surpassed Dallas in size. Its post office was established in 1913. A new school, completed in 1915, was built for elementary and high school students. It provided busses to transport students from rural areas. At least three churches, Methodist, Catholic, and Adventist were built, as well as two banks, two lumber yards, a theatre, and a hotel. In the late 1920s, Melcher's population numbered about 2,000. It had surpassed Dallas in size. The combined population of the two towns was about 3,000. Though the two towns were located directly next to each other, they continued for many years as two separate rival entities.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Melcher Hotel, early 1900s. Now used for other businesses.

### **The Consolidated Indiana Coal Company**

By 1913, the Consolidated No. 1 mine was producing 2,000 tons of coal a day. It was 200 feet down, one of the deepest in the State. It was referred to as "The Million Dollar Miracle." The mining camp was named "Electra" because the mine was the first all-electric mine in this part of Iowa. Payrolls were large, and much of the wages were spent in Melcher and Dallas. Business places had to adjust rapidly to supply the demand for goods for the swelling population of miners who worked in this giant mine.



During World War I the U.S. Government took over all the Nation's railroads as a war measure, and the Indiana Consolidated Mine was closed for many months. When it reopened in 1921, the event was hailed with joy and relief by everyone in Melcher. (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 2/ 23/ 21).

In 1923, the Indiana Consolidated Coal Company was preparing for the opening of their #2 mine. Machinery was being moved from old Mine #1. A small city of tents and shacks sprang into existence where 10 hours before the "tall corn grew." Preparation was made by the Rock Island Railroad for tracks to the mine. Sinking of the shaft was to begin as soon as the tracks were laid, and the mine would be ready for working by July. The company had obtained coal rights to a vast territory and the mine was to be a very large operation. It would be a great boon to Melcher as well as to the whole area. It would be, for a time, the largest mine in the State.



(Russell Nelson)

Street in Melcher, 1926

Those who have never been associated with coal mines may wonder what life was like for the miners and their families. Wilma Johnston of Melcher gives us her memories of the #2 mine in a piece she wrote for the Melcher-Dallas Centennial book. Her father was the person in charge of the mine mules. (It will be noted that the the mules in this mine were handled differently than in most of the large mines, which had stables in the mine, and the mules never got out of the mine). This is what she wrote:



"My dad, Frank Waters, started working at the Consolidated Indiana Coal Company #2 when it opened (1923). He stayed at Dave Crowe's until a house was moved to the mine for us. I lived there from second grade until I graduated from high school.

Mine workers made up a small community and became close friends. Those living on the hill, east of the mine were John Hall, a boss, and Martin McFall who later was replaced by Frank Nash who worked in the office. Frank Waters took care of the mules, and Mr. Bradbury was the night engineer and watchman.

Each morning Dad took the mules down into the mine on the cage, which was dropped. He stood between the mules and quieted them. It was dangerous standing between two mules when they went down the first time. At the end of the day he brought them back up and turned each one loose at the barn door. There were 48 or more, each with his stall and name written on it. They went straight to their stall. On weekends, they were turned out into the pasture west of the big barn. It was a sight to see them all rolling at once.

Dad went to work at 4 a.m. and was home for his second breakfast when the starting whistle blew. Each morning a stream of cars went past our house to the mine and toward home again at the end of the day. Many miners walked down the track to and from town. My father-in-law drove, except in bad weather when the car wouldn't start. Then he walked six miles, worked all day and walked six miles home, did farm work, and bathed in a small round tub to get the black off.

It was quite a day when the new bath house was built with many showers. We, who lived at the mine, could use it on weekends. It was nice in the summer.

It was a bad time for everyone when the mine went on strike. We went to Indiana to my mother's folks, and Dad spent the summer putting shingle siding on her house. When the mine went back to work, things went on as usual. The work that was done by the men and mules in the mine, few people can imagine. They were brave, strong, God-fearing men and they worked hard."





(Russell Nelson)

Mule pulling coal car out of a slope mine.

In 1928, the Indiana Consolidated Coal Company purchased mineral rights under 405 acres of land west of the mine, thus indicating that they intended to continue in coal mining for many years to come. In 1929, in fact, the Company opened up Indiana Consolidated #3 in Lucas County, just to the south of Marion County, and continued mining until 1942.

Consolidated was the giant in the industry but smaller mines under private ownership dotted the scene also, making a total of 18 mines in the Melcher-Dallas area. They included the Midwest Coal Company, the Long and Smith Coal Company, the Black Diamond Coal Company, the Melcher Coal Company, the Red Dog Coal Company, the Red Rock Coal Company, and others.

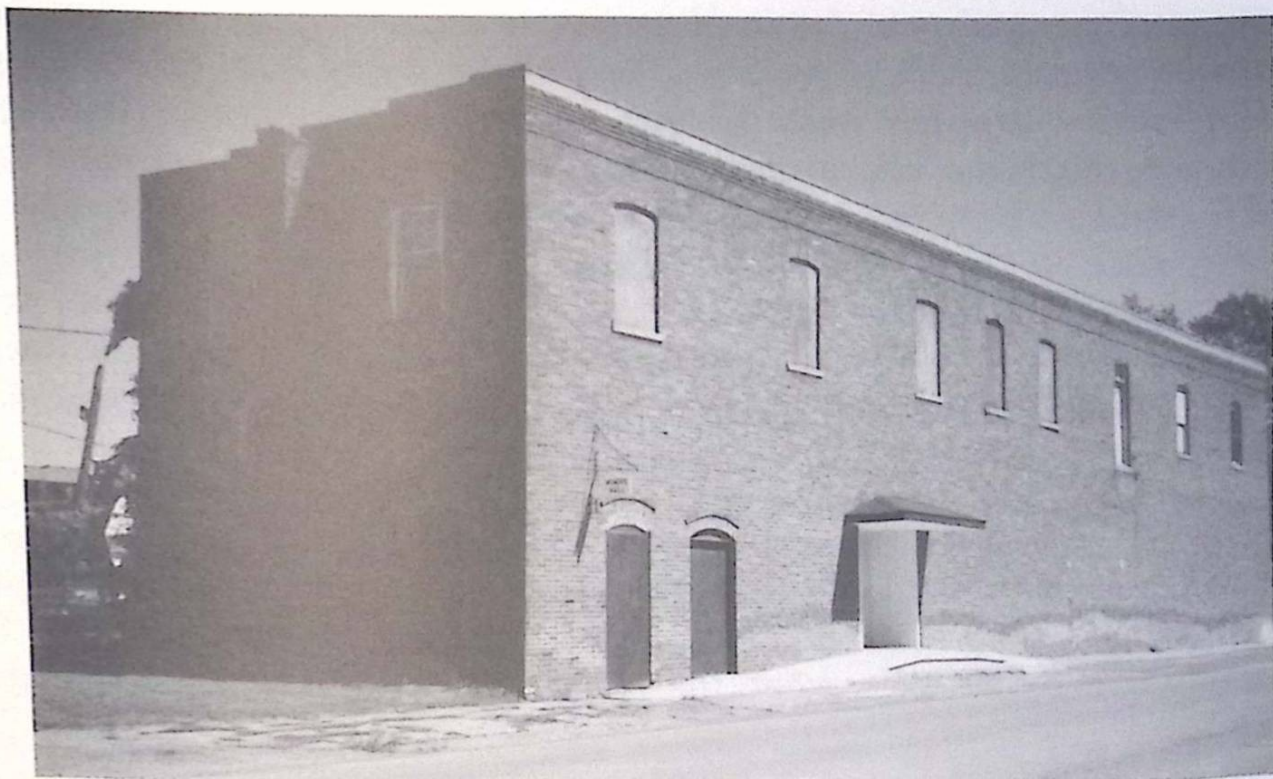
The Melcher-Dallas miners were loyal members of Local 1504 of the United Mine Workers of America with 600 members enrolled from the Consolidated and Red Rock mines. Their Miners' Hall was a two story building on the Square. They rented the first floor to a furniture and undertaking business. The upper floor contained a large meeting hall for their own purposes, and it was also used for various lodge meetings and other social gatherings. Presently, a coal mining museum is being planned for the Miners' Hall, which is certainly a most fitting use for it.



The local Union established a good system of death benefit assessments for its members and their dependent children as well as liberal sick and accident benefits to care for their own sick and injured members. Sympathetic to the problems of all miners, their Union at times assisted miners in other fields who were on strike or unemployed.

Melcher was proud of local man Owen Owens, who became the vice president of the Iowa Miners' Union. Born in Wales, he had worked as a check weigher in the local mines for 20 years. He had joined the Union when he was 17 and had always worked for better conditions for the miners.

As was true in many large Marion County mines, the Melcher miners were involved in many strikes which were devastating experiences. They are discussed in Chapter 15.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Miners' Hall, Melcher. The only remaining Miners' Hall in the County.

### Mine Accidents

The Melcher-Dallas mines experienced their share of fatal accidents. Listed are a few which are illustrations of the variety of tragic events which could happen down in the mines.



In 1921, 38-year old Pasquella Pelligrini, native of Luchau, Italy, who had worked in the mine for six years, was killed when he was near the bottom of the shaft when a large chunk of coal fell 150 feet, hitting him on the head. He died in the hospital at Albia.

One of the terrible accidents that occurred in the Red Rock mine happened as Philip Jenkins, age 16, who worked with his father as a track layer, heard an ominous cracking sound followed immediately by tons of heavy slate falling, pinning them both beneath the debris. Fellow workers rushed to the aid of the two and succeeded in removing the weight from their bodies. When young Philip was reached, it was found that his right arm was completely severed from his body and lying on the other side of the track. They rushed Philip to the top of the mine and to his home where medical attention was given to save him from bleeding to death. A high-powered car was brought, and he was rushed to Des Moines in an attempt to save his life.

Mrs. Jenkins, mother of the stricken boy, became hysterical when she learned of the accident and followed the ambulance to Des Moines, not having learned that her husband was also injured. The latter was removed to his home where neighbors had given him attention. His injuries were not so serious. (*Knox JI-Exp.* 4/23/25)

In February, 1926, shot firer George Matkovich, a Croatian, was burned, mangled, and crushed, and he died. When the shot was being tamped, it had exploded and burst into flame. He left a wife and five children.

Slate falling from the roof of the mine striking a miner was the most common cause of accidents. In 1924, George Jones, one of the most popular of the older miners (51 years) met death just at quitting time, as he was putting away his tools, when the roof fell in on him. (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 7/3/24)

And there were many, many more tragic accidents. It is reported that in one mine there were 17 deaths in one year. Usually a widow and young children were left behind to make their lives as best they could after having lost their main source of support.

### Mishaps in the Red Rock Mine

The promising, productive Red Rock mine met a sad fate in February, 1933, when fire broke out in the mine and pretty much destroyed it. One



hundred-thirty five miners were at that moment out of work. Headlines in the February 2 *Knoxville Express* stated that "The Red Rock Mine is done." And, indeed, it was. The miners entered the shaft for the last time to remove their tools. The owners, the Central Iowa Fuel Company which had operated the mine for 16 years, removed its equipment from the shaft. as well as the mules which fortunately were still alive. The mine was abandoned.

The old equipment of the Red Rock mine was sold for junk and trucked to Des Moines. A most unfortunate ending for the mine and its miners.

The miners now without means of support, appealed to the Red Cross for aid. The Melcher Welfare Association, prominent in relief work among the unemployed men, helped also.

Even after the old Red Rock Mine was abandoned, unfortunate happenings occurred there. In July, 1935, the little 8-year old son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Kersey of Melcher lost his life in the old reservoir. He had been in the water only five minutes and apparently had a heart attack and drowned.

Alfred Bergston, 66, an old Melcher miner, committed suicide by drowning himself in the pond of the old Red Rock Mine. He left a note in which he said he worried over the lack of work and the state of his finances.

Some very good, heart-warming things happened in Melcher too. At Christmas time, 1933, A.W. Stillwell, a respected Sunday School teacher, was wonderfully surprised when a big load of fine coal appeared at his home. It was a gift from his Sunday School class. There could have been no more welcome gift during those Depression cold winter days.

Both Melcher and Dallas people were very loyal to their athletic teams. In 1931, they were proud and excited when Melcher won the Class A County Basketball Championship and Dallas won the Class B Championship. The Melcher basketball team was the County champ both in 1929 and 1928. Baseball was also a sport in which they excelled.

### **Melcher Bank is Robbed**

During the hard Depression times when money was almost non-existent, the miners' payroll bag was one of the biggest and best sources of money for robberies.



Excitement and fear gripped the folks of Melcher on the morning of March 11, 1934, when bandits were spotted in the Town Square at about 9 a.m. They witnessed the bandits overpowering L.P. Palmer, bank cashier, as he carried a small mail sack which had arrived on the train from Des Moines.

He was taking it from the depot to the bank. It contained \$7,000, the payroll for 160 men who worked in the Indiana Consolidated mines. The bandits made their getaway with the mail sack. Their abandoned car was found in a cornfield the next morning by a neighboring farmer. The robber was never apprehended nor the money recovered.

### **Decline and End of Coal Mining**

Coal mining began to decline in the '30s as the railroads turned to diesel fuel for their engines, and as the Depression weakened the markets. Difficulties between mine operators and laborers resulted in strikes lasting for months, causing workers to look for other types of employment. In the late '50s, coal mining was a thing of the past.

Today, Melcher-Dallas is one town instead of two rival towns. Actually Melcher and Dallas were just across the street (Border Street) from each other. Both towns benefited from the coal mining trade. Yet, rivalry between the towns had been strong and bitter. But as time went on, the people of both towns saw the folly of maintaining themselves as separate entities, and in 1955 they joined hands and became Melcher-Dallas, one town. Their two separate schools now form one very fine high school. Its combined population, 1990 census, is 1,302.

Many of its people are commuters. Proximity to Des Moines has made it possible to find employment in John Deere, Firestone, and other factories as well as to find employment in office and other urban activities. From its earliest involvement in farming into an economy heavily based on coal mining, many of its people have today become involved with the urban activities of the city of Des Moines and other places. Farming, however, also remains as an important economic activity.

Coal Mining in Melcher-Dallas had lasted more than 25 years and was a factor in making a fairly stable economy for the town, as well as a boon to the nation in its growth to power and in its war years. Few visible remnants of the coal mining industry remain. Its coal mining heritage is however a rich one, and lives in the minds of those who once worked there.



They remind themselves of their rich coal-mining past each year in their annual "Coal Miners Days" celebration which takes place the fourth Saturday of June. They feature a parade at 11 a.m., an auction, wagon exhibits, and various entertainments.



## Chapter 6

# HARVEY

Harvey, on the the south side of the Des Moines River, is on the northern edge of the heavily-endowed, heavily-mined coal areas of Knoxville and Liberty Townships. Its coal areas, which for the most part are located south of the town, are only about five miles from the giant Pershing operations. In contrast, Harvey's coal deposits and mines are of medium and small-size.

Mining and miners have been significant in this area through the years, but mining is only one of its economic pursuits. Harvey never was a mining camp.

Yet, coal, probably more than any other of its resources, was what propelled Harvey into early growth and great expectations. Harvey was platted in 1876 along the Des Moines River. It was surrounded by excellent deposits of coal, had unusually fine white clays for ceramics, and other clay for making blocks and tile, limestone, large deposits of sand and gravel from the river bottom area, heavy stands of timber, including maple trees for the making of excelsior, and potential water power from the Des Moines River. It was a rich endowment of resources.

Furthermore, Harvey is flat compared to the great coal areas just to the south of it, and therefore railroads considered it an ideal place to lay their tracks, a place to cross the Des Moines River, and a place to pick up coal for fuel. In the mad rivalry among competing railroad companies to stake out economic territories for themselves, three rail lines were laid through little Harvey - the Rock Island, the Burlington, and the Wabash - a real overkill. At one time, Harvey had 10 passenger trains and 12 freight trains going through town each day. People referred to Harvey as the "Chicago of Marion County."

Harvey had two large department stores, a flourishing brick and tile plant, which supplied the neighboring towns with its building materials, an excelsior plant (which burned twice), a cement block plant, a print shop, a newspaper, and of course its coal mines. No other town in the County could boast such an impressive array of economic ventures.

For various reasons - withdrawal of promised capital, big fires, lack of good business leadership, and the Depression of the 1930s, Harvey's busi-



nesses failed one after another, and the town slowly declined. The decline was accelerated by the withdrawal of plans to build a large cement manufacturing plant. Instead of becoming a thriving business center as predicted, it now lies dormant with few visible signs of its prosperous years. Harvey's population dwindled to 175 (1995) and is presently without even a grocery store. The big schoolhouse has been made into a museum, and the children attend the Knoxville School. The gymnasium where the Harlem Globetrotters and the Chicago Hottentots once played basketball has been razed.

Two ventures continued when retailing and manufacturing failed - one was farming on the river bottom land, especially on The Island, a large area of bottom land enclosed by the main channel of the river and a former channel. It was far from an ideal place to live, but gardening did well as did growing watermelons, and it was a good place to trap mink and other animals. Unfortunately, it was often flooded and in any kind of weather it was inconvenient to get off the island.

Coal mining was a somewhat marginal way of making a living because of seasonal layoffs, but it remained as the longest continuing economic venture in the Harvey area.

Underground mines - both shaft and slope mines - prevailed in earlier years, and in later years these former mines were reworked as strip mines. A number of small mines were worked under various changing ownerships, and others were listed in Government publications as of unknown ownership.

The Rigger mines operated from 1933 to 1955. The McKenzie and Geery mines were in operation in 1915 and into the 1920s as underground mines, and later they were reworked as strip mines.

Some of the mines used steam powered hoists to get the coal out of the mine, and very small mines might use power from car motors or even horse power. Small mules and ponies were used to move the coal from the place where it was mined to the entrance.

Every morning before dawn, wagons would already be lined up for early loading of the coal. Many came from Pella the evening before and stayed all night. It was a long hard pull to Pella with a heavy wagon load of coal over the dirt roads and up the steep incline from the river.

Although the monetary returns to the miners were often not so reward-



ing, invariably the miners took pride in their work and they enjoyed the challenge of working together. And they were proud of their town.

They especially delighted in the excellence and the success of their baseball team and were enthusiastic fans at the competitions with other towns and mining camps. Harvey's team was of almost professional caliber.

The miners knew how to enjoy their times off work. They enjoyed life's simple pleasures. Fishing in the Des Moines River and trapping on The Island were not only great sports but helped feed hungry mouths as well. Swimming in the river was wonderful, and even better was the swimming in the abandoned sandpit right on the The Island. Here the water was deep, cool and clear, and the beach sands were so white and so fine. What a mecca it was not only for the local populace but also for people from Knoxville and other places, seeking to escape the brutally hot summers, especially in the '30s.

The other side of the picture was dark and foreboding. The families of the miners were constantly gripped by fear for the lives of their husbands and fathers. The Pershing mine whistle, which wailed the death of a man in their mines could be heard at Harvey, sending chills down everyone's spines.

Miners' families recall the song, *A Dream of the Miner's Child*. They listened to it on the radio and even joined in singing it. A little girl pleads with her father, "Please don't go to the mines today. Because I never could live without you."

Woodrow Geery recalls the day the Superintendent of the School called four children of one family to his office and informed them that their father had been killed in a mine accident. Their wails and cries permeated the whole school, and other kids began to cry, too.

The story of A. C. Geery, Harvey miner, provides insights into the trials and hardships and triumphs of being associated with a coal mine. Son Woodrow Geery's *Tales by a River Rat* (1994) portrays the family in a series of tales that are poignant and perceptive and witty. Newspaper items and interviews with Woodrow Geery furnish additional information about A. C. Geery and his family:



## Portrait of A. C. Geery

A. C. Geery was a co-owner with Mr. McKenzie in the McKenzie and Geery Coal Mine in the 1920s. The mine was doing well and the Geerys and their six children were financially secure. Then the bane of miners struck in 1923, when Geery was pinned to the floor of the mine by a slate fall.

Fortuitous circumstances prevented his death. The following item from *The Knoxville Journal*, April, 19, 1923, tells the story:

### HURT IN MINE ACCIDENT

"A. C. Geery, one of the owners of the McKenzie and Geery mine in Clay Township near Harvey, was very badly injured by a fall of slate and rock last Saturday forenoon.

The man suffered a dislocation of one ankle and one hip and he probably had several ribs broken. He was taken from the mine as quickly as possible and rushed to the Williams Hospital in Oskaloosa. It was feared that he suffered internal injuries as well. He is about 36 years of age and of rugged constitution which is, of course, much in his favor in the matter of recovery."

Son Woodrow relates in his book, "After days of hospitalization and recuperation, my father returned home, and the Geery kids viewed with awe and fear the culprit piece of slate as it lay exhibited on the waste pile."

As with most injured miners who recuperate, Geery returned to the mine. Motivated perhaps by his close call with death, he soon sold his share of the Black Diamond mine, bought a new Chevrolet, and bought and moved into a large two-story house, and the family lived a good life. He bought a team and wagon and began hauling coal, but the lure of coal mining drew him back.

He decided to go back to mining, and he sank another mine shaft. This time, it was no Black Diamond, and the venture was a total failure, which left him deeply in debt. Then began a sojourn that was to involve four moves including two years on a farm.

In the winter of 1927-28, as the Great Depression loomed on the horizon, Arch Geery again returned to mining, this time to a one-man operation in a mine about three miles southwest of Harvey. He would not work alone.



## A Dream of the Miner's Child

1. A min-er was leav-ing his home for his work. He heard his lit-tle child scream. He  
 2. I dream'd that the mines were all stream-ing with fire. The men all fought for their lives. Just  
 3. Go down to the vil-lage and tell all your friends. As sure as the bright stars shine. There's

went to the side of the lit-tle girl's bed. Oh Dad-dy I've had such a dream. Oh,  
 then the steam chang'd and the mouth of the mines, Was cov-er-ed with sweet-hearts and wives. Oh,  
 some-thing that's go-ing to hap-pen to-day, Oh Dad-dy don't go to the mine. Oh,

**CHORUS**  
 Dad-dy don't work in the mines to-day For dreams have so of-ten come true. On

Dad-dy my Dad-dy please don't go a-way I nev-er could live with-out you.

Song, A Dream of the Miner's Child. Popular miners' song in the '30s.

Consequently, one of his sons had to miss school and go with him. (see *The Story of the Mine Mule*.) He cautioned his sons not to throw pieces of coal or slate against the mine walls because the miners depended on their ears to detect the rumbling warnings of possible slate falls - and there must be no competing noises.

This was Geery's last coal mining venture. The family remained in Harvey while Geery ended his working days as the foreman of the Wilson Sand and Gravel Company and later as the foreman of the Harvey Brickyard.

Geery's mining experiences paralleled those of many other miners in the County. Slate fall accidents and succumbing to foul air continued to



plague the miners. Many of them dreamed of having their own "place." The lure of coal mining and the heartaches of the Depression caused common emotional highs and lows.

### The Mine Mule

(An anecdote detailing a child's view of working in the mine is here related by Woodrow Geery.)

I hated that damn mine mule. Maybe he had a name, but he was just a mine mule to me. I was scared of him. Scared as hell. You'd be scared too if you were only eleven years old and had to be around him in a coal mine.

That's right, I was only eleven. Living during the great depression was tough in many ways. Three days a week in school and two days in the mine with Dad. Sure I got lonesome. Dad was too busy to talk, and like I said, I hated that mule.

He was an ugly creature, I thought, black as the pits of hell with a huge elongated head, long ears, and big yellow teeth. He was bigger than most mine mules. I steered clear of him most of the time, but when I had to be around him, his big red-veined eyes seemed to assess me with a baleful glare. He pulled the loaded mine cars from the rooms to the foot of the mine slope, where they were pulled out by a Model T Ford Engine-powered windlass. All winter long he was stabled in a niche in the wall of the main tunnel. I had to pass by him to go outside the mine for blasting supplies for my Dad who was working the coal vein. It was a small operation. Dad was the only miner. I was sort of a helper and a companion.

Now a coal mine is spooky as hell for a young boy with a vivid imagination. The feeble yellow flame from the carbide lamp on my pit cap struggled to push back the inky darkness. It barely succeeded at times. Abandoned rooms off the main tunnel were hung with masses of cobwebs, and bats flitted about in the eerie light of my lamp, that is, when I was brave enough to peer into the room openings. Ogres and monsters of all sizes and shapes stared back at me from behind the piles of waste that cluttered the room. Cleverly and bravely, I disposed of them with a mere turn of the my head. Not so, the mine mule. My fear of him was real and he was real.

While Dad drilled the holes getting ready to blast the coal, I would work



nearby with my anxiety mounting, waiting for those dreaded words, "Wood, go outside and get me some powder and fuses."

That made me want to pee in the worst way.

I would walk down the tunnel, and as I neared the mine mule's stable, I could see his eyes glowing in the dark as he watched me approach. I would almost suffocate with fear. I would search wildly for a magic way to make my trip without going by that evil thing, waiting there to sink his big yellow teeth into my arm or kick me with his flint-like hooves. Slowly, cautiously, I would inch closer to him, then ducking my head to avoid a sagging mine timber, I'd race past. This was repeated on my return trip.

I was on my way out of the tunnel one day when disaster struck, and I knew absolute terror. Things seemed different as I walked up the tunnel. Even the ogres and monsters seemed more vicious when I peered into the abandoned rooms. Some of them roared and charged so close that I could see their gruesome features and smell their foul breath. But I stood fast and in the nick of time laid them low. The mine mule's eyes seemed to glow with an extra redness as I approached him. My heart began to pound as my fear mounted. Had he in some diabolical way figured out how to foil my mad dash and was now poised in the darkness ready to dispose of me in some horrible fashion? Trembling, I readied myself.

"Now," I thought. Piston-like my legs churned to propel me past that incarnate brute that threatened my very existence.

As I drew even with him, I made a horrible mistake. I forgot the sagging mine timber and raised up. My head hit the timber and my carbide lamp flew to the floor and went out. Knocked to the floor, I sprawled on my back alongside the mine mule, dazed and terrified in the utter darkness. My heart tried to escape my body as I lay there gasping for air and waiting the first crunch of those big yellow teeth.

His warm breath on my cheek petrified me. Softly, his nose nuzzled my cheek. Still I could not move. Then came a gentle nudge. Slowly, ever so slowly, I raised my hand and gently placed it on his nose. This brought forth a soft whickering noise as though he was relieved that I could move.

Regaining some composure, I lay there stroking his nose and then slowly rose to a kneeling position and placed a hand on each side of his long head. He responded with another nudge with his nose. More strokes - more nudges.



Kneeling there, I realized that I had never tried to make friends with the mine mule. I thought, "How lonely he must have been, spending all winter in the dark isolation of the mine. Not a kind word or action from me - only rejection." Ashamedly, I realized my fear and hate had been based on preconception and not fact.

For several more minutes, I knelt there stroking his nose, and he continued to gently nuzzle my chest. All the while, I felt guilty and regretted my treatment of him.

I found and lighted my carbide lamp. In the glow of the yellow flame, I stood face to face with the mine mule. What a handsome animal!

\*\*\*\*\*

Then there was another story concerning the Geery kids and a mine burro. It is related in Geery's *Tales by a River Rat*, page 42:

"Daisy was a cute and cuddly little burro who was used underground to pull the coal cars. She was almost a family pet, and we kids felt anger and sorrow when she died of blood poisoning as a result of a wound inflicted by an over-zealous mule driver. We wrapped one of her tiny shoes in tinfoil and hung it on the kitchen wall in remembrance of her."



## Part IV

### EARLY MINING CAMPS WHICH HAVE DISAPPEARED

Implicit in the word "camp" is its impermanent nature - an army camp, a boy scout camp, a concentration camp, a mining camp - it is there today, gone tomorrow. It exists for people who have a mutual relationship - they work at the same place or have some mutual purpose or reason for being. There is usually a uniformity of living quarters.

When a coal mine was opened in Marion County or elsewhere, it needed a large number of miners. Usually, they came from neighboring mining camps, which had just been abandoned. Or people came from some other part of the country in a desperate search for a job. Many were poor immigrants from Italy, Wales, England, and other European countries.

They came to an area where there was little housing or infrastructure. The Company had to supply these, and in the process often ruled the town. To guarantee Company control, the camps were unincorporated - there was no other institution of government.

The mining camps tended to be dreary and colorless, even ugly in appearance though quite colorful in their boisterous activities.

For the most part, even the names of former mining camps in Marion County are forgotten, and the site now shows no evidence that it was once a flourishing place where human beings lived, worked, played, worshiped, and were educated. The camps were completely abandoned - houses, businesses, equipment, mules - all were moved to the next coal mining camp. The maps do not even indicate where they once were.

Andersonville, Cricket, Donley, Electra, Everist, Hawkeye, Cobalt, McCagg, Whitebreast, Yankee Hollow - who of us in Marion County knows anything about any of them? Perhaps some remember hearing of Buxton, Iowa's largest mining camp ever, which was across the line in neighboring Monroe County. Even that memory is fading.

Two, once famous, large mining camps which have completely disappeared from the landscape - Everist and Andersonville - will be discussed in this section.

When the automobile came into common use, it was the death knell for the mining camp. People could easily commute to a mine from an established neighboring town and thus ensure more permanence in their lives.

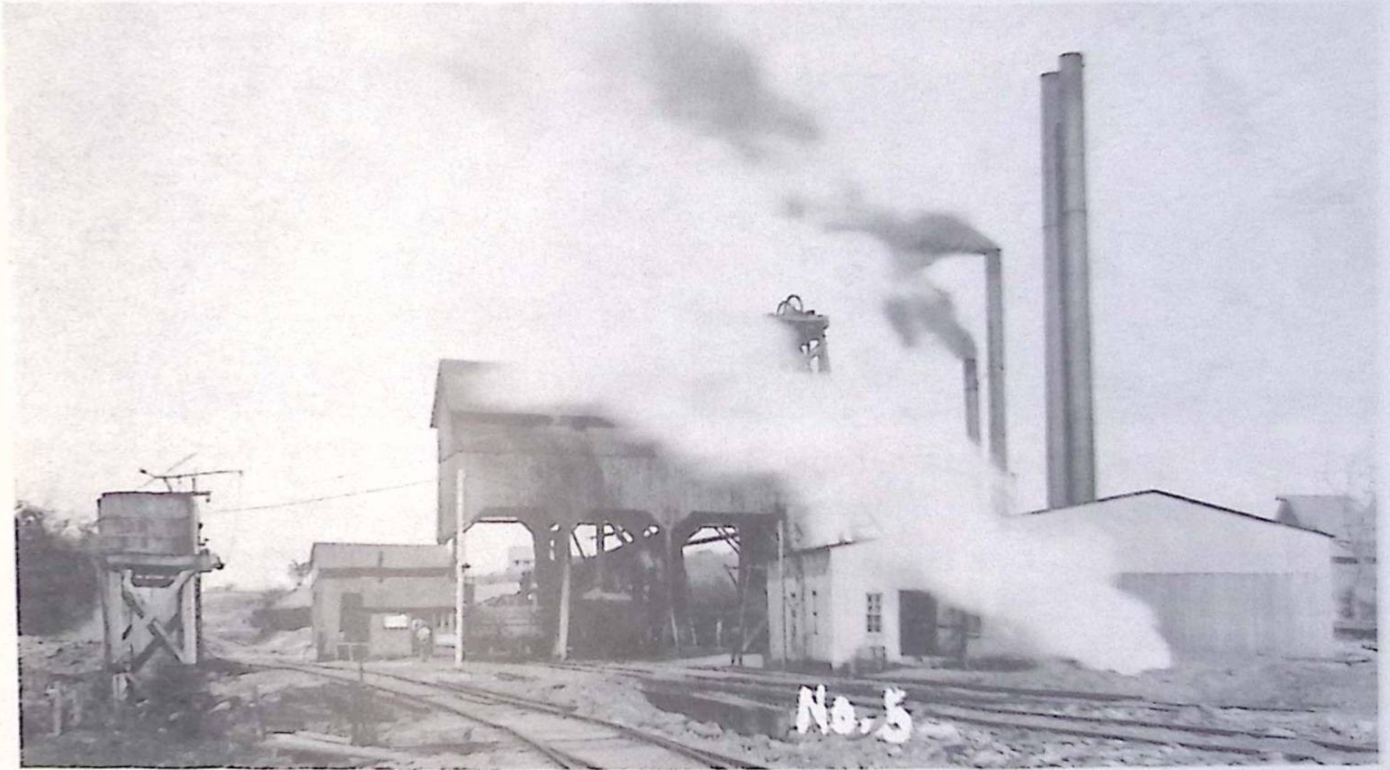


## Chapter 7

# EVERIST

Everist (approximately at the junction of present day Highway 156 west of Bussey and Highway 5) developed as the mining camp for the Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company, which was organized in 1903 in Section 17, Liberty Township. Here an extraordinarily thick vein of coal was discovered averaging 8 feet thick, and in some places as much as 16 feet in thickness. The Company opened several slope mines in the area - Mines 5, 10, 11 - and they became the richest and largest in the County. When the Wabash Railroad built a spur from Tracy to the mines, the Company was really "in business." Their mines were among the earliest shipping mines in the County.

Everist became a busy place. Miners came from abandoned camps such as Excelsior and Evans in neighboring Mahaska County, and, in fact, from any nearby area where the coal had been worked out.



(Lorena Stokes Vander Linden)

Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company #5, Everist.

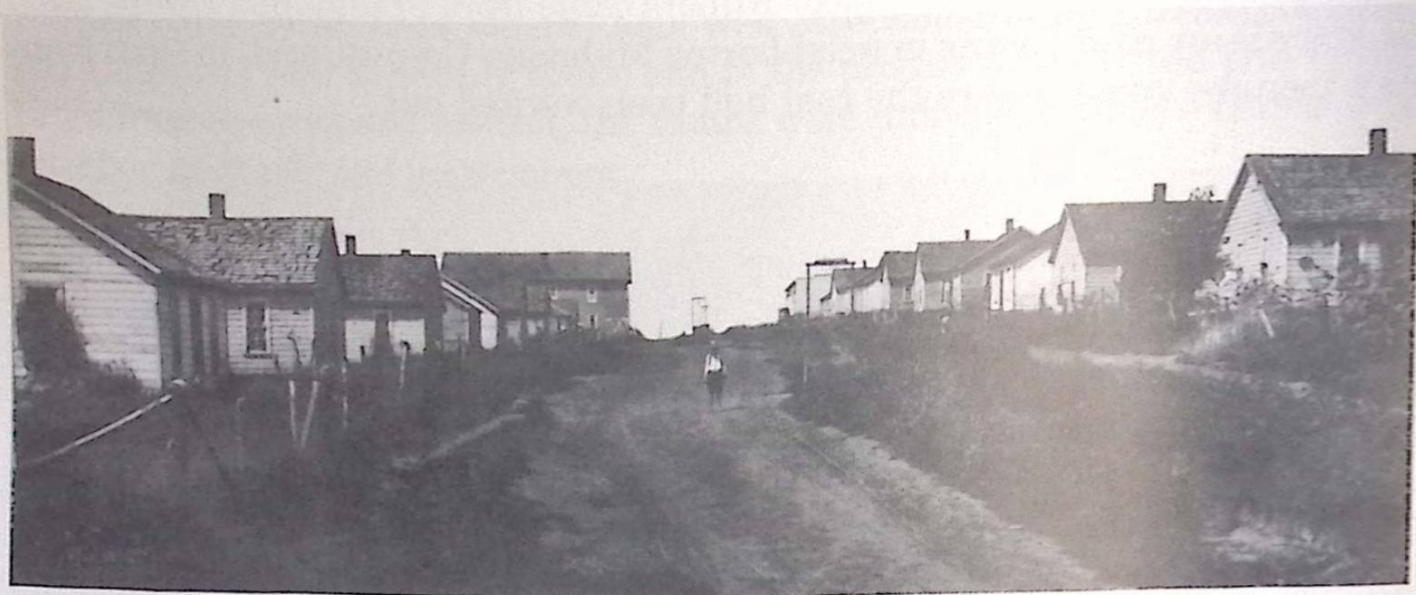
The Company's first concern, of course, was housing. John Melone, an early day Bussey contractor, (Bussey was the town nearest to Everist) claimed he was the man who built Everist. He signed a contract to build



80 homes in Everist in 90 days. He and his gang went to work and in 60 days they had used up all the lumber supply that Knoxville was able to get. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 4/11/26)

The Company moved in additional houses from the then defunct mining camp of Evans in Mahaska County. They took the houses down section by section, hauled them to Everist on hay racks, and reassembled them. They were set on oak posts about four feet off the ground. A front porch with steps to the ground was added. Eventually there were at least 200 miners' homes.

A neighboring farmer, A.A. Davis, had built a row of houses which he painted green, and people called it Greenville. A group of houses near the #5 mine was called Redville because all the houses were painted red. Some of the houses were never painted.



(Lorena Stokes Vander Linden)

Main Street, Everist

There was one outhouse to every four houses and one well for every eight or twelve houses. Water supply was a dire problem - most families had to carry it a quarter of a mile uphill to supply the drinking and cooking needs. When wash day came, it was a hard day for the children and/or women who had to get the water.

It was terribly cold in the houses and so the people used oilcloth and straw to try to keep the wind from whistling under the porch and blowing through the house. Frost covered the walls up to five feet high so that the children had to play behind the stove to keep at least a little warm.

No school house was immediately available so the children had to wait almost a year before they could get back in school. They played on the



streets, enjoyed watching workmen build a brick Company store and other buildings for the new town, and generally had a good time.



(Edna Fry Moses)

Uncles Henry and Thomas Hall with Myrtle and Edna Fry. The Halls later became miners in Pershing. Miner's home in background.

By the next winter a log cabin schoolhouse had been built and soon after that a new schoolhouse was built. Nora Davis, the teacher, was from a nearby farm, and she rode a pony to school. She was very strict, and when someone whispered she threw a hard wooden eraser at them. On Friday afternoons, they had arithmetic contests which were somewhat similar to spelling bees; the contestants could choose either a subtraction or an addition problem.

A metal stove fueled with coal heated the schoolroom. The boys loved to go outside to get a pail of coal so as to break the monotony of classes. Alas, the school building caught fire one night in late spring and as there was no fire department, it burned to the ground.

The Everist Mercantile Company was the name of the Company store, the principal business enterprise in Everist. It included a slaughter house where the employees killed hogs to sell as meat in the store. The butcher did not scald and scrape a hog as most people did - he skinned it, which saved a great deal of time and the trouble of heating a great quantity of water.





(Edna Fry Moses)

Miners' kids in Pershing, Terry, Richard, and Margee Gott (front) and neighbor kids, Sandra, Richard and Jenny Wolfe (rear).

A year or so after the schoolhouse fire, the store caught fire and again there was nothing anyone could do except watch it burn. It did not take too long to rebuild it as the basement wall and the foundations were still in good condition. Meanwhile a temporary store was kept in someone's house.

A few years later when the manager of the store moved to the new mining camp at Andersonville, young William Fry, son of mine boss Joseph Fry, was made the temporary manager.

During the first few years of Everist's existence, a two-story community building was erected, one story for a pool room and the other a place for lodge meetings, medicine shows, and school programs. The pool hall eventually suffered the same fate as the schoolhouse and the Company Store. The lack of a fire department was becoming expensive. It was little wonder that buildings were made as cheaply as possible.

Telephone connections were made, and a post office which operated from 1905 to 1914 was evidence of Everist's prosperity. A few people even had automobiles!

As the population continued to grow, the Shiloh Public School building was erected, and Everist had five teachers. Even this building was soon too small for the children of the many coal miners who came to live at Everist, so another building was placed right beside it. A little later both of these burned down and a new building was built on the site.



The miners at Everist knew how to have good times. Several played musical instruments, and a bandstand was promptly built. People gathered on the Fourth of July and on summer evenings to hear the music. Many times groups of young men gathered at the bandstand after baseball practice, singing such songs as "Moonlight Bay," "Kentucky Babe" and others. Little girls sometimes came with their dolls and made a playhouse out of it for a brief time. And the bandstand, standing as it did in the shade of big willow trees, was a pleasant place to sit and chat on hot days.

The Everist young men played baseball on a diamond laid out in a pasture. Everist's two independent teams, the Green Socks and the Red Socks, played each other every now and then, and on the Fourth of July they traditionally played each other in two games - one in the morning and one in the afternoon. When they played teams from other mining camps, they traveled by buggies or farm wagons to the the game. They were good teams and put their hearts into the game. When an Everist team won, they came home singing. When they lost, they came home a bit more quietly.

The Cedar Creek was a wondrously beautiful place lined with soft grassy banks and huge trees. It was a delightful place to swim in the summertime and to ice skate in the winter.

For most of the inhabitants, the grim aspects of living in Everist were outweighed by the good times.



(Edna Fry Moses)

Joseph Fry's Model T Ford.



Unfortunately, by 1912, coal mining was already on the wane as the rich vein was becoming worked out, and 50 homes were moved to Andersonville, a new flourishing coal mining area near Knoxville. The school population decreased so that only three or four teachers were needed. Several years later only one teacher was hired as many of the miners had gone to other coal fields.

In 1919, mining in Everist closed down completely, and the stock of the Company Store was moved to the budding mining camp of Pershing, several miles to the north. Young William Fry, employee in the Everist store, moved the groceries by truck to the new camp. (See portrait of this man, chapter 17.) A number of Company houses were moved from Everist to Pershing. Several of Greater Mammoth Vein Company's mine bosses were also transferred to Pershing, among them Joseph Fry and Tom Rowland. (See portraits of these two men, chapters 17 and 18.)

Today, the site where a railroad once ran is just a pasture. There is no schoolhouse. Whatever children live in the area are bussed either to Bussey or Attica to school. The land has reverted to farming land.

Evidently a few people remained on the site a while longer. The *Knoxville Journal* continued to carry personal items, even as late as 1929, concerning visits between Pershing and Everist people who had connections with one another.

As the years passed, all of the houses disappeared. What was once a bustling mining camp is now a cattle farm. The mining days are all but forgotten. It is history.



## Chapter 8

# ANDERSONVILLE

It's hard to find anyone who has heard of old Andersonville, which was located about three miles north of present-day Pershing. Anyone born the day the mine opened in 1912 would be 83 years old today.(1995). Furthermore, it seems that when the mine closed, the people completely left the area.

Fortunately, I was able to find a woman who was born the year the mine opened and had lived in Andersonville until she was eight years old, at which time her family moved to Pershing. Her father left the mine at Andersonville to work in that new mining town.

Mabel Brady (now Mrs. Bausch of Pershing) remembers that there was a Union Hall, a two-room schoolhouse, a company store, another store run by Tony Vercellino, who later had a store in Pershing, an ice house, and likely other business enterprises. There were 200 company houses. Mabel remembers especially what fun it was to play in the timber and along the railroad tracks where there were lots of wildflowers. It was so beautiful. Once she and a friend walked all the way to Pershing (a little more than three miles south) without telling her parents. Yes, she got "warmed" when she got home again.



(Mabel Brady Bausch)

Mabel Brady and baby sister,  
Andersonville.



Mrs. Jim Goff of Knoxville relates that her husband, when a boy, delivered fresh milk and eggs to the Andersonville Company Store, which was a mile north of their farm. When the mines were closed, son Jim Goff, who now operates the Goff farm, says his father bought the Company store and used it for a barn for some years. It has since been torn down. The Company store was located where the Natural Gas Pipeline now crosses old Andersonville - just to the east of graveled road 165th Avenue.

### Liberty School

Liberty School, which served the Andersonville community, had two rooms, one for the blacks and one for the whites. It was run as if it were two different rural schools. However, the patrons soon realized that it was an impractical situation to have to duplicate every grade and soon integrated the school. That worked out very successfully and there were no problems.



(Joyce Barnett Hayes)

Liberty School, Andersonville

In later years, the Liberty School, in fact after old Andersonville was abandoned, had pupils from McCagg mining area near Flagler. The population was in a great state of flux as one area, then another was being mined, and new families with children moved into the neighborhood.



The Barnett family alone (from the McCagg area) had 20 children and grandchildren attend this school through the years. (see portrait of Barnett family, Chapter 19) Joyce Barnett Hayes recalls that it was such a pleasant school in the late 1940s when she attended. There were about 35 students, only a few of whose families had been in mining.

The teachers were good, the students congenial. It was fun to go after water from a neighbor's house in company with other pupils as they played and talked along the way. Baseball was a favorite sport at recess time. She liked the community meetings held monthly at the schoolhouse and the good things to eat. Christmas was so special with the programs in which every student had a part. End of the school year picnics were another highlight.

The Liberty School, an architectural gem, came to an ignominious end when finally it was sold and used by a local farmer as a hog house. It has since been torn down.

### **Impressions of the Old Andersonville Today**

Driving through the abandoned Andersonville mining camp area, one gets a sense of unreality about it. Instead of a bustling mine and mining camp with many homes and miners and miners' children running around, it is deserted and wild. A wild turkey suddenly soars up out of the brush and into the sky and disappears. A riot of tall grasses and wild flowers clothes the road side - wild roses, yellow trefoil, red clover, purple thistles, and white daisies line the uncared for roadsides in early summer, and other flowers take over in other seasons.

A narrow gravel road with a few houses on it winds through the area. The land is pocked with depressions, some of which have water standing in them. They are doubtless the result of subsidence of the land, as underneath it is honeycombed with abandoned mines. The County Engineer's Office says that roads in the area frequently cave in at the sides and need to be repaired.

Low ridges alternate with those low, wet areas. One of the ridges is the abandoned Rock Island railroad grade. The English Creek, one of the most winding in the county, is lined with gnarled vegetation. The area has a subdued appearance of sadness as well as of beauty.

Suddenly, one comes upon a huge, shiny, white gas pipe with a billboard which states it is the Natural Gas Pipeline which extends from Texas to



Chicago. It is several feet in diameter, and it winds its way across the countryside. It is an ugly intrusion, a shock to the eye. It is so out of character with the rest of the area. Instantly, it comes to mind that, yes, this is what killed off the coal industry. The Pipeline crosses the land exactly where old Andersonville once was.

### Evolution of Andersonville From Farming Area to Mining Area

One can perhaps better understand the appearance of the Andersonville countryside if he/she is somewhat aware of the extensive changes wrought upon the area to prepare it for coal mining.

The late C.B. Campbell, who for years was prominent in the Marion County Historical Society, wrote a graphic *History of Andersonville* based on clippings he assembled from the *Knoxville Journal*.

He describes the tremendous preparations made for the opening of the Anderson coal mine. In so doing, the landscape was virtually remade. Similar steps were necessary in preparing for the opening of any deep mine. In most mines, however, the transformation of the landscape was not so extensive.

The first step is prospecting, in other words, running a drill down into the ground in order to discover the types and depths of the underlying rocks. If there is coal, the prospector measures the depth and especially the thickness of the seam, and by drilling in many nearby places, the extent of the seam. In the Anderson area, 42 drills sunk within a distance of 1-1/2 miles from each other revealed a seam ranging from 6 to 9 feet in thickness, which was really good news.

If a shipping mine (rather than a mine that sells locally) is desired, a railroad spur or switch must be made to the nearest railroad line. In the case of the Anderson mine, it was done as follows: A construction company from Des Moines arrived with a number of men, 40 mules and horses and four railroad cars filled with scrapers, plows, and other tools to begin work on a Rock Island coal switch from Flagler to the location of the new mine.

Next, living quarters must be constructed for the railroad men who would work laying the tracks, etc. Contractors spent several days setting up a temporary camp on the north side of the rail line. Then another contractor came with 50 mules and 50 men to make a camp on the south side of the rail line.



Next, the coal company filled in the land between Flagler and the English Creek preparatory to laying the rails - a major change in the environment.

The company would practically remake the landscape. Another construction company arrived to construct three bridges and numerous culverts for the Rock Island stub. A large bridge with a length of 263 feet and rising 22 feet above the tracks was constructed over the Burlington Railroad tracks east of Flagler, about 1/2 mile north of the Rock Island tracks. A smaller bridge, about 200 feet in length, was built over English Creek. Lick Creek's course was changed so that bridging that stream would not be necessary. Six feet of solid stone were acquired for use for piers and abutments for the bridges.

The changes made in the landscape were mind-boggling.

Meanwhile, it was necessary to prepare the mine itself. The company loaded five carloads of materials in the Des Moines railyards ready for shipment to Knoxville. Then they began to dig and sink a hoisting shaft for lifting and lowering men, mules, and materials and lifting out the coal. What a huge, time-consuming job it was to dig so many feet down. It would take months. When the shaft was finally finished, all dug out by hand, horizontal tunnels or entry ways had to be dug to make the coal accessible.

The way this digging for the shaft and for the entries was done was that two men with picks and shovels put dynamite or other blasting powder on the designated area. When it exploded and loosened the stones and earth, those materials were shoveled out, and then the whole process would begin again. Using these methods the men could advance only a few feet each day.

The company contracted for excavation for a reservoir to furnish water for the engines at the hoisting works, the reservoir to be 150 by 150 feet and 15 feet deep. Every mine must have its reservoir.

Big timber, 20 to 36 feet in length and 12 to 16 inches square for the tipple and the pillars in the mines, was being shipped from the pine forests of Mississippi.

Steam pumps had to be installed to keep removing the water as it collected at the bottom of the shaft.



An air shaft had to be dug 92 feet down and about 300 feet from the main shaft so that fresh air could be pumped in for the miners.

A tippie 63 feet high, one of the tallest in the State, which would sort coal chunks as to size, was constructed. Boiler and engine houses were also built.

An office building, the powder house, a storage building, a blacksmith shop and a fan house, three sets of scales, and four sets of railroad tracks in the yards would complete the outdoor installations.

While preparations for mining the coal were underway, 200 houses for the miners who were coming had to be provided. Many carpenters were hired to build the houses. Some houses were moved in from mining camps which were closing, for example, houses were moved in from old Everist. Boarding houses were built for single miners. Likewise, a general store with a wide range of merchandise, a butcher shop, and stables for the mules had to be provided.

Consider the fantastic amount of planning and work necessary to get this complex infrastructure for the mine into place. Every underground mining company had to make similar preparation, though most of them would not need to remake the landscape to the extent of what happened in Andersonville. It would surely be hoped that the mine could be mined for many years before being worked out. (Ten years was said to be the average time a mine could be profitably worked.)

It was a happy moment for the miners when on September, 1912, sixteen months after construction work started, the whistle blew its first blast, signifying that the mine was ready. The big Anderson Mine started feverishly producing and shipping out coal, working day and night. The entries had been opened and six rooms "struck off" to allow for 40 miners. By December, as the digging of entries and opening of rooms was constantly being extended, 75 miners were on the job and by March, 100 miners were working. About 250 tons were shipped out each day.

The miners joined to form a Local of the United Mine Workers of America. It was a full-fledged shipping mine.

### Personal Items

A few interesting personal events from Andersonville appeared in the Knoxville newspapers from time to time. Remember that newspapers



have a way of seeking out and printing the violent and sordid events rather than the Ladies' Aid meetings.

In July, 1921, a feud ended in the shooting death of James T. Johnson by Joe Kelly, colored. A large crowd had been drinking and carousing at Kelly's home where the shooting took place. Various men were arrested for possession of liquor, and one man for having 35 gallons of whiskey at his residence. Kelly escaped. After several days, he was discovered hiding under his own house. At the trial, Kelly's wife, a well educated woman, gave evidence that caused jurors to find Kelly guilty of manslaughter instead of murder.

In August, 1921, "Swede" Little hit a colored man, Horace Franklin, on the head with a brick. Franklin had turned a horse loose in Little's pasture. Franklin's wife had torn down a part of the fence to make this possible. Little was fined \$10 and costs. At least, no one could claim that racism was a factor in the decision.

In November, 1921, an Andersonville miner who had done well financially and owned a 20-acre farm, sent for a bride from his native Czechoslovakia. He had seen her only once, and that was 20 years ago when she was but three years old. She came by railroad to Knoxville, and they were married.

In 1922, Andersonville still had 95 miners at work. Then, an unfortunate, unexpected situation was discovered. The miners ran into a fault (a displacement of rock layers upward or downward so that layers are discontinuous). The coal vein ended suddenly in a rock formation. The Anderson Fault, as it became known, continued for some distance following a somewhat circuitous path and was later the cause of other mine failures.

The hopes for a long life for the Anderson mine and Andersonville ended in disappointment. The mine closed and the town went out of existence in the early 1920s. Its miners looked for other mines where they might find work. Many of them went to Pershing three miles to the south, which was just beginning mining operations. Some of the Andersonville houses were moved to Pershing, too.

## Epilogue

In 1936, no one had lived in old Andersonville for many years (which



turned out to be a fortunate thing). Yet on the Fourth of July of that year, the wildest display of fireworks ever seen (or heard) in Marion County was staged on the site. A blaze of fire shot 500 feet up into the air and burned for two hours. The temperature that day was already 107 degrees, and the heat from the blast resulted in an inferno. It was like a miniature volcano. Cold fear gripped folks' hearts 15 miles in each direction as they heard a giant, shattering explosion and saw the flames in the sky.

An explosion had occurred in the Natural Gas Pipeline which had been laid through old Andersonville a few years before, and ripped out a piece of steel pipe six to eight feet in diameter. The pipe crumpled like paper and was thrown 700 feet from the scene into some timber, a twisted mass of steel. A crater 25 feet deep and 2 1/2 feet in diameter was formed where it fell to earth. It was interesting that the crater was clean-cut and showed different formations of soil and gravel to a depth of 25 feet.

One hundred acres of crops to the north and east of the blast were burned.

People in Pershing, less than three miles away were stunned and terrified. Some of them thought the world was coming to an end.

Bussey, about 10 miles to the southeast, famed for its annual Fourth of July celebrations, was upstaged, and its celebration was nearly wrecked by the competing fireworks. Old Andersonville had made itself known in no uncertain way. A real Fourth of July display of fireworks with "bombs bursting in air!"

Dynamite was suggested as a possible cause for the explosion. The farmers of the area had been far from happy to have the pipeline laid across their lands. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 7/ 8/ 36)

(The site of Old Andersonville is about 4 miles south off Highway T15 on 165th Avenue at the place where the big Natural Gas Pipeline crosses the land. Andersonville was on both sides of the road.)

(From Pershing to Andersonville, a distance of about 3 miles, take paved road G62 out of Pershing, turn right at 170th Avenue, left on Oregon Drive, right on 165 Avenue.)



## Part V

# PERSHING, LARGEST MARION COUNTY MINING CAMP

This section is made up of eight chapters about the Pershing Mining Camp. It deals with two great mines, Pershing #12, 1919-1938, and Pershing #14, 1938-1947. It also deals with the people who worked in these mines.

The eight chapters are:

- Pershing, the Miracle Mining Camp
- Growing and Growing Pains in Pershing
- Religious, Social, and Recreational Institutions in Pershing
- A Pershing Miner's Life
- Role of Women in Pershing
- The Ominous Side of Strikes
- From Riches to Rags in the Distressing Thirties
- End of #14 and of Underground Mining in Pershing

The unique fact about Pershing is that it is still there - that people who were related to or knew all about some of the old miners like to sit in their comfortable chairs and reminisce about the good old days when the town was bustling with miners.

Pershing may be located very easily. Go south out of Knoxville on Highway 5 for about 7 miles, then east (left) on G62 for about 2 miles.

It will be interesting to make observations as to housing, conditions of the foundations of these houses, condition of the streets, yards, churches, or of the park. Or go to Bonni's Cash and Carry convenience store and restaurant, have a cup of coffee, and chat with whomever is there about Pershing and the mines it once had. (Weekday hours are limited, usually around noon time. Weekend hours extend through most of the day.)

Two other great mines operated in the vicinity of Pershing in later years. They were the Lovilia #3 shaft mine, a mile west of Pershing and the Sinclair (Wilkinson) strip mines, several miles east of Pershing. Though the popularly used term for the latter is the Pershing Strip mines, they were not related to the Pershing mining camp, nor did they officially go by the name of Pershing. They will be described in Chapter 21, Revolutionary Changes in Coal Mining.



## Chapter 9

# PERSHING, THE MIRACLE MINING CAMP

Startling double headlines in the *Knoxville Journal* of August 28, 1919, read: PERSHING THE NEW COAL TOWN. The Coming Pittsburg of Iowa. Named for the Great Army General, is Marion County's Latest Boom Town. Growing Like a Mushroom!

Thus was announced an event which proved to be of great significance. Pershing would become the largest mining camp in Marion County, and the only one in Iowa which would survive as a town after the mines closed.

Obviously, Knoxville was excited by the news. It would be "a shot in the arm" for their business enterprises, a financial boost for their town.

Pershing was the outgrowth of the Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company, the company which had produced the Everist mining camp about five or six miles to the south. The stockholders later changed their name from the Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company to Pershing Coal Company, in honor of that great general John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, who had led American troops in World War I and who was very popular with the American public.

Pershing, of course, was no surprise to the workers who had been digging for the two preceding years, tunneling down into the earth with their picks and spades to provide space for the hoisting shaft and airshafts for the new mine. It was no surprise to the workmen who had built a railroad grade and laid tracks for a railroad spur which would join the Pershing site with the Wabash Railroad at Tracy. Nor was it a surprise to the farmers near the site who could view the temporary little shacks which had been constructed to house the workmen.

The town was to be platted and the mine shaft sunk eastward from the Zion Methodist Church, an already existing country church and cemetery (which today is located about a mile west of the main residence section of Pershing.)

This advertisement for mine workers appeared in *The Knoxville Express*, August 4, 1920:

ATTENTION MINERS: OWN YOUR HOME AT PERSHING,  
THE MODEL MINING TOWN OF IOWA. Steady work. 8 foot



vein. Best coal field in Iowa. Good railroad connections. Ideal working conditions.

Fifty new houses of 4 and 5 rooms each now being built. Choice lots. Come and see for yourself.

Opening of town site sale, August 6, and continuing four days. Something doing all day. One choice lot to be given away free.

If you want a permanent job, a good home in the best field in the state from the miners' standpoint, come to Pershing.

This is the new mine of the Pershing Coal Company and will not be worked out in your lifetime.

No taxes until 1922. No payments during sickness. No mortgages. No notes. We want you at Pershing.

(signed) The Pershing Coal Company, 225, Iowa Building, Des Moines, Iowa.

Though some of the above claims proved to be exaggerated, or untrue, the advertisement brought fast results. The town of Pershing literally sprang into existence. Almost immediately, a total of 130 lots were sold. The average price was \$175, some going as low as \$150 and a few as high as \$225. Lot owners could build their homes in whatever plan they desired.

A side attraction in Pershing the day of the sale was a baseball game between a Pershing team picked from newcomers in the area and a visiting Melcher team. Pershing won 6-2. The feature of the game was the pitching of George Gott of the Pershing team, who struck out 11 men in six innings. In the sixth, Gott injured his arm and had to leave the game. But at that moment, the Pershing people knew they would have a great baseball future. They had positive enthusiastic feelings about their new town-to-be.

### **Housing**

In addition to the houses the new lot owners would build, the coal company planned to erect 105 four and five-room, one-story residences all on the same general rectangular plan. They were to be built on block foundations, stuccoed outside, and the interiors lined with wall board. There



were no basements, and the same is true today in Pershing. The Company added residences at the rate of one per day.

According to *The Knoxville Journal*, August 28, 1919, "Two weeks ago Pershing existed only on the plats that had been prepared by the coal barons. Today, it is a booming village!"

A number of the houses of the original design can still be seen (1995) in Pershing. They were all basically alike - an oblong-shaped house with sloping roof, all four surfaces of which meet in a center peak. A kitchen and living room were on one side and two bedrooms - or three if an extra partition were put in - on the other side. This style of house was being built in the majority of mining camps. Many of these houses remain today, perhaps renovated and altered, but easily recognizable as one of the original Company-built homes.

Additional homes of various styles were moved in from the old deserted mining camps of Andersonville and Everist and later some from Buxton.

Lot owners and prospective residents said that they had little fear of an influx of colored people as had happened in the nearby mining camp of Andersonville (they were wrong-colored people came in 1927-28).

### **The People Come**

The population explosion began. From the original 50 Company people who had come to make preparations, Pershing grew to 700 by September 1920. For the next four years, the town grew at a rate of about 200 each year until in 1924 when the population of 1,500 was reached. Also by 1924, 15 businesses had been established, and 600 men were working in the mine.

Before it was widely known that a big new mine was to open in this place, the Company had contracted with a builder to construct a row of five or six stucco houses, which would be occupied by their administrators of the mine - the foremen and the bosses.

In December, 1919, Joseph and Mary Ann Fry, little five-year old Edna, and their tomcat came in a buggy from Everist. Edna remembers that the hill they had to climb (Laird Hill) was very steep. Joseph (see also Chapter 17) had been a "boss" in the Greater Mammoth Vein mines and that would be his position at Pershing #12.



The Fry's son William, (see also Chapter 17) came by truck with the groceries from the Everist Company store. He had worked in the Company store at Everist and was to work in the Company store to be built in Pershing. His two young sisters accompanied him.

The Frys were to live in one of the stucco houses. built for the administrators. Soon to come were Tom Rowland (see also Chapter 19) and family, the John Nicholsons, and the Earl Love families. They would be neighbors in the new town - neighbors for many years.

As houses were built or moved in from the almost deserted mining camps of Everist and Andersonville and perhaps other places, miners of many nationalities began to move in - Italians, Czechs, Welsh, Irish and others. According to Edna Fry (now Mrs. Ernest Moses), it was fun for the children to see houses being moved in and placed on a lot, to see new houses being built, and to play in the houses before they were occupied.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Original stucco home in Pershing (with extension on the back).

Some of the miners came with big families as was common in those times. One can imagine how crowded they were. Edna Fry (Moses) recalls how crowded her aunt Deborah's house was when they moved in with nine children. Each house had but two bedrooms, though an extra partition could be put in one bedroom thus making three almost impossibly small



bedrooms. The baby slept in the bed with the parents. The other children were squeezed into the one or two other bedrooms.

Furthermore, many families rented out a room and boarded a single miner in order to earn a little extra cash. (The Company rented only to married men.) Some built a little shed at the back for this purpose, but in many cases, this single miner was an additional occupant of the house. Other families "boarded the teachers."

The first car of coal was hoisted up from Pershing #12 on January 2, 1920. Before that time, some coal had been brought out in buckets.

When the whistle blew announcing that it was time to get to work that January morning, the miners' hearts were filled with joy and hope as this polyglot of people streamed to the mines, dinner buckets in hand. Many had known each other from other mines they had worked in, but some could not even speak each others' languages. Doubtless, the families left at home were out watching the men pouring out of their houses and converging towards the mine shaft.

### **A Girl Reporter's View of the Mine**

Of course, the Knoxville folk (and Pershing families, too) were curious to know what this new, highly touted, giant mine was like. An underground mine is not something people are permitted to go down into or take a tour through. It was against the law to go into the mine except when in the company of some official of the Company. It was not intended to be a place to visit. So that everyone could know a bit about the mine, however, a girl reporter from the Knoxville newspaper was given permission to go down into the mine with the foreman. She reported her findings in layman's terms.

They went to the mine shaft, got into the cage (elevator) and went down at a dizzying speed - 200 feet down. In the murky darkness, little gleams of light from the carbide lamps attached to the miners' caps helped them get their bearings.

Down below, she found it was a veritable underground city with a main street and cross streets. The main street (entry) was about eight feet wide; the cross streets (cross entries) not quite as wide. The entries were lined on each side with a pillar of coal so that the ceiling would not cave in. Tracks similar to railroad tracks had been laid in each of these entries.



The coal cars drawn by mules ran on these tracks to transport the coal cars to the mine shaft. Here the coal could be hoisted up to the surface.

Rooms, lined and propped up with timbers so that their ceilings would not fall down, led off from the entries. The "diggers" worked in these rooms, often in a crouched position, knocking the coal loose with their picks and then shoveling the loose coal into coal cars. At that time there were 300 rooms, each measuring about 20 feet wide and 200 feet long.

In addition to the main shaft by which one descended into the mine, air shafts had been constructed to pump fresh air into the mine. The air shafts were equipped with stairways for rapid exit from the mine should there be a cave-in. They had a double purpose.

She visited the mule stables, which at that time provided for 22 mules. Water for the mules was piped into the mine, and grain for feed and straw for bedding were brought in by the elevator in the main shaft.

She learned that from 50 to 60 loads of timber consisting of props to hold up the ceilings, and railroad ties, and rails were sent down into the mine every night.

Of the 600 workers at the mine, 347 were diggers - the real miners. Others were entry diggers, shot firers, trappers, timbermen, mule drivers, bosses, and many other types of workers.

She was impressed with the miners. They were very courteous and kind and considerate. Not a word of rough talk. She thought the mine was a nice pleasant, dry place in which to work.

The foreman ordered the cage and they were out once again into the world outside, where there were a number of buildings - an office, a power plant, a blacksmith shop for shoeing the mules and sharpening the miners' tools, a carpenter shop, a sawmill, and a timber storage place. A high structure called a tippie was used to separate the various sizes of coal by running the coal over different sized screens. (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 11/29/22)

### Stockholders Visit the Mine

An amusing incident occurred two months later, when the company almost lost two of their stockholders. They had come from many places to inspect the mine and its workings. *The Knoxville Journal* of March 31, 1920, chronicles the event:



"Nearly 100 stockholders from all parts of the State arrived by special train of Pullman cars from Tracy, making the maiden journey on the 7-mile spur connecting the mine to the Wabash. They were served a chicken dinner by the Ladies' Aid of the Methodist Church at Tracy and then continued on to visit the mine and the model town of Pershing.

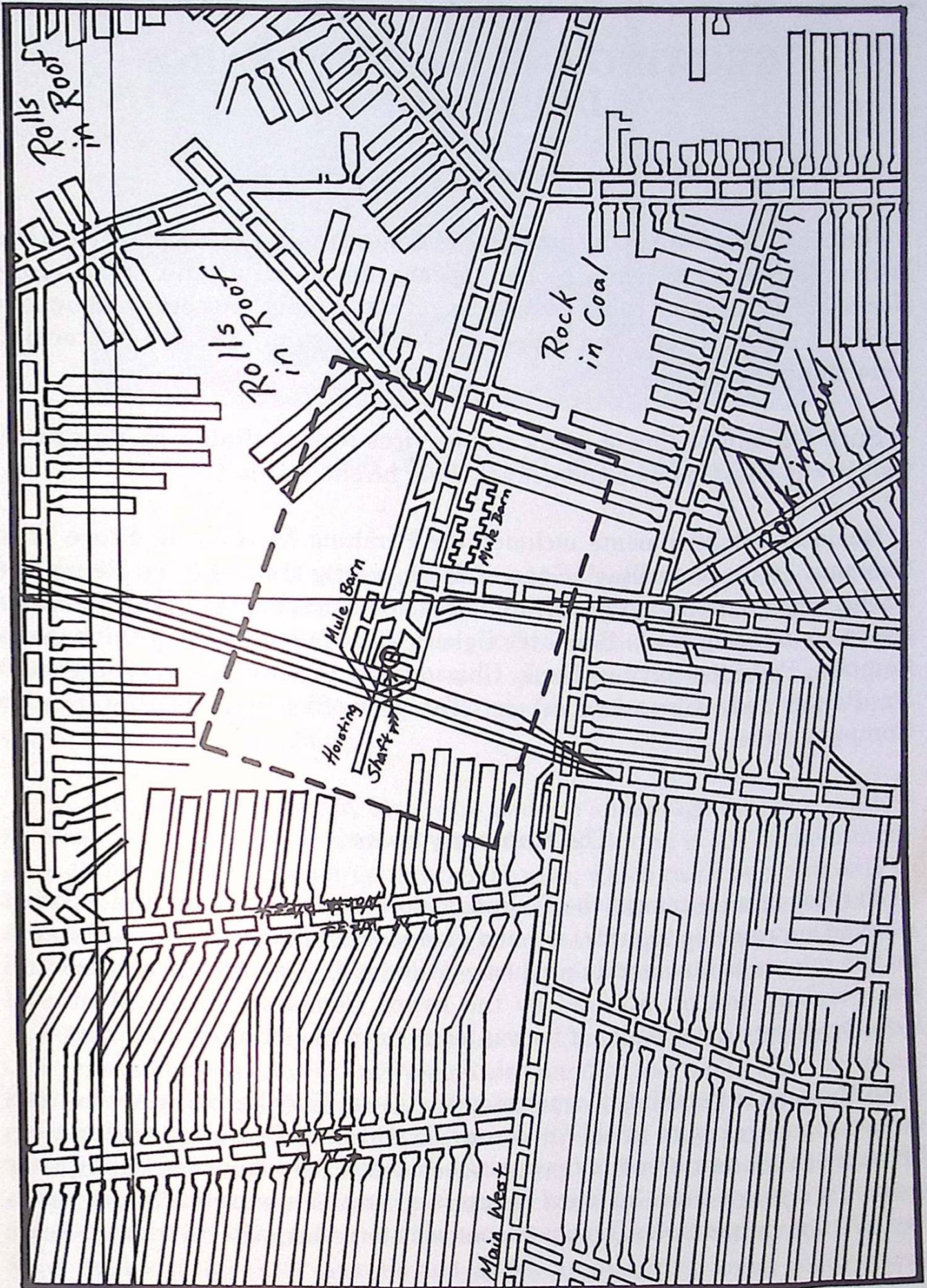
The officers of the company conducted the stockholders down the cage of the hoisting shaft and gave them a tour of the bowels of the mine. When they finished the tour and returned to the surface they found that two of the group were missing - a Mrs. Martin and her daughter from Washington, Iowa. There was great consternation as the stockholders descended into the mine once again and conducted a frantic search. Finally, after giving up the search and returning to the surface, they found the women waiting for them. They had gone back to the surface before the others had left the mine."

One of the actions of the stockholders at that time was to officially change the name of the company from the Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company to Pershing Fuel Company.

The mine operated under the management of L. P. Love who lived in Des Moines; Jim Duffy, superintendent; J. A. Williams, the mining engineer; G. D. Miller, the bookkeeper; and Thomas Rowland, the mine foreman. (*Knox.Jl-Exp.*, 10/11/22)

(At right): Pershing #12 mine - Photo of a small section of blueprint 39 inches long. It is dated 1920 and numerous updates are added. The central part of the mine is the Hoisting Shaft, with elevator (cage) to hoist up the coal and carry down the men and supplies (timbers, feed for the mules, machinery, etc.) At the far left, "Main West" designates an entry (or street) - note the symbol used. The tracks are laid in the entries for mule drawn carts to transport coal to the hoisting shaft. The elongated areas are the rooms, where miners dug out the coal, each separated from the adjoining room by a pillar (wall) of coal. Each room is about 200 feet long and 20 feet wide. Dangerous spots are noted - "Rolls in roof." Worthless areas are noted "Rock in coal."





(Orbra Geery)



## Chapter 10

# GROWING AND GROWING PAINS IN PERSHING

### Business Places in Early Pershing

Naturally there are many problems and inconveniences when an entirely new town with so many people appears almost all at the same time. Necessary businesses came into being rather rapidly, but infrastructure such as a school, streets and highways, sewage system, and fire protection were slower in coming.

Such a complete line of goods and services was available in Pershing, that it was boasted one could get anything he/she wanted.

Business establishments included the Pershing Mercantile Store (the Company store), Vercellino's General Store, a drug store, Pierce Brothers' Barber Shop, Larrington Pool Hall, Reese and Russell's Pool Hall, George Ryerson's Skating Rink, Berolati's Bakery, Reese's Restaurant with soda fountain, Pershing Savings Bank, Chiropractor Don Robinson, Physician Dr. Porter, and even a taxi driver. The post office was located in the Company store.

### The Company Store

In most mining camps, the Company store had no competition, and it reigned supreme as to prices it could charge and pressures it could exert on the miners to buy certain products. (William Fry records in his journal the pressure put on his Dad by the Evans Company store (Mahaska County) to buy a new suit - if he wanted to keep his job in the mine.)

In the case of Pershing, there was competition. Tony Vercellino who had owned a general store in old Andersonville moved to Pershing and set up his store in the north end of town, just across the road from coal company land. In a year's time, he found it necessary to add a warehouse for storing extra merchandise. (The abandoned old store may still be seen today.)

Through the years there were other stores which came and went.

Then there were peddlers who came into town - the customers had to meet them on the street. Arthur Parsons sold meat from a leather pack





(Mabel Bausch)

Pershing Company Store. Warren Smith "taking it easy."

he carried on his back. George Basset sold butter and eggs. Another peddler sold ice. Ice cream was sold from a little push wagon. Pete, the ice cream man, rang a little bell to get his customers' attention. Leona Rowland Allen recalls a Jewish man who came periodically with good quality cloth - serge and other materials for making dresses. The women eagerly awaited his coming.

Of course, the Company store still had the advantage over the vendors in that they could extend credit and collect by taking it out of the miner's pay check. The customer got scrip in change, which could be spent only in the Company store. Also, it was always possible that subtle job favors would be granted to those who shopped at the Company store - nothing too noticeable because the Union protected its men from abuses.

Mr. Neagle was the first manager of the Company store. The post office was housed in the store, and Neagle also handled the mail. The Company was so predominant among the businesses in Pershing that each little event involving it was mentioned in the Knoxville newspaper - the addition of an ice house stocked with ice cut out of the Des Moines River, the addition of a butcher shop with a butcher hired from Illinois, the traveling salesmen who stopped to sell fruits and meat products, that Mr. Neagle had added a stock of overalls and ladies' aprons, even some ready-made dresses and millinery from Marshall Field's in Chicago, the installation of a cold air refrigerator, a new furnace, the purchase of a Burroughs adding machine. Almost nothing that happened in the Company store was left unreported.



Police protection was almost non-existent. The County Sheriff was the main law officer, and he was far away. More than once the Company store was robbed, once by some obviously professional thieves. In November, 1922, burglars blew up the safe and robbed the store of \$200. Government detectives were called in. It was considered certain that the offenders would be brought to justice very soon. Blood hounds were put on the trail, but they could not carry out their mission, for the footsteps of the thieves were completely wiped out by so many people crossing and recrossing the area. The thieves were never found. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 11/11/22)

The Company store was robbed twice in one month in 1925. There were no clues. Missing in the second robbery were 50 automobile tires, 10 inner tubes, 500 packages of Camel cigarettes, 5 sacks of flour, 4 100-lb. bags of sugar, and many other articles.

### Fires

During the course of the years, the Company store burned three times. George Ryerson's skating rink and an adjacent pool hall burned in 1923, a loss of \$20,000. The wonderful Miners' Hall burned down in 1930 - its moving picture theater, pool hall, Union records - all gone, a huge loss estimated at \$30,000. That was the second big fire in a week - a garage and oil station had burned a few days before. Homes burned. Lack of fire protection was a terrible problem. Almost every time a fire started, the building burned to the ground.

### Transportation to the Mine

A pressing need was transportation to the mine. There were those who for quite some time did not have housing and had to commute from a nearby mining camp or town - many from Attica, four miles away. Two far-sighted men in Knoxville, Cecil and Clark Jeffers, saw a business opportunity. They bought an 18-passenger bus and ran round trips from Knoxville to Pershing twice a day - they offered to run it more often if that should prove necessary. The fare was 35 cents.

In 1922, the Tracy-Pershing commuter route was opened by the Wabash Railroad. A big gasoline railway motor car on the coal switch, made several round trips between the two towns each day. Though the object of the motor car was to carry Tracy miners to and from the big mine at Pershing, all classes of passengers were accommodated, and a regular schedule observed.



In addition to these two methods of getting to the mine, there were men who walked five or six miles a day to get to work. As one ex-miner said, "One of the most exhausting parts of mining was the long walk to work, especially when it was muddy."

At least, the miners were fortunate in that once they got into the mine, "man cars" drawn by mules were available for carrying them to the room they were to work in, which could be as much as two miles from the shaft.

### **Highways and Highway Maintenance**

Roads into and out of Pershing were very poor for many years. Good roads were scarce in the early 1920s because automobiles were only beginning to come into prominence. Furthermore, there had been little need for highways into the area before Pershing came into existence - but now suddenly there was a great need for roads.

Dirt roads have always been awful in southern Iowa; they tend to be very sticky when wet. In addition, there were several winters in the 1920s when snowfall was very heavy, and snow removal equipment was lacking, especially for country roads. For one reason or another, there were times when Pershing was cut off from the rest of the world.

1923 was a hard winter. Snow piled up in drifts 9 feet high. No school in Pershing. The teachers and pupils could not get there. The school wagons from Attica were unable to come - the high school students didn't mind especially as one of these times was during semester examinations.

Shortages of meat, butter, fruit and carbide for the miners' lamps caused Mr. Neagle of the Company store to hire a bobsled to go to Knoxville to pick up the mail and to get much needed groceries and mining supplies.

Buses carrying miners from Tracy, Bussey, and Knoxville were unable to buck the deep drifts. The miners tried to help get the roads open. All church and social functions had to be canceled.

When a miner was injured and had to be gotten to the hospital as soon as possible, the miners joined in getting him to the highway by bobsled. Once on the highway, he could be moved by ambulance to the hospital. A man who died had to have his funeral postponed for some time until roads would be opened once again.



Eventually, there were better times. In 1922, the County Board of Supervisors petitioned the State Highway Commission to include the road between Knoxville and Pershing in the primary road system - which meant it would provide some degree of maintenance for this road as well. It was the first glimmer of hope for better days to come.

## Schools

An overwhelming need existed for a schoolhouse and teachers. Pershing was in the Attica School District, but there was no way Attica could take care of the influx of 500 extra children. It was incumbent upon the State of Iowa to alleviate the problem. In 1919, a bill was introduced in the Legislature to raise revenue for the support of schools in mining camps by requiring that coal owners pay the State a tax of 2 cents per ton of coal produced and sold. It failed for lack of support. (Iowa Journal of History and Politics, Sept. 4, 1919, page 12)



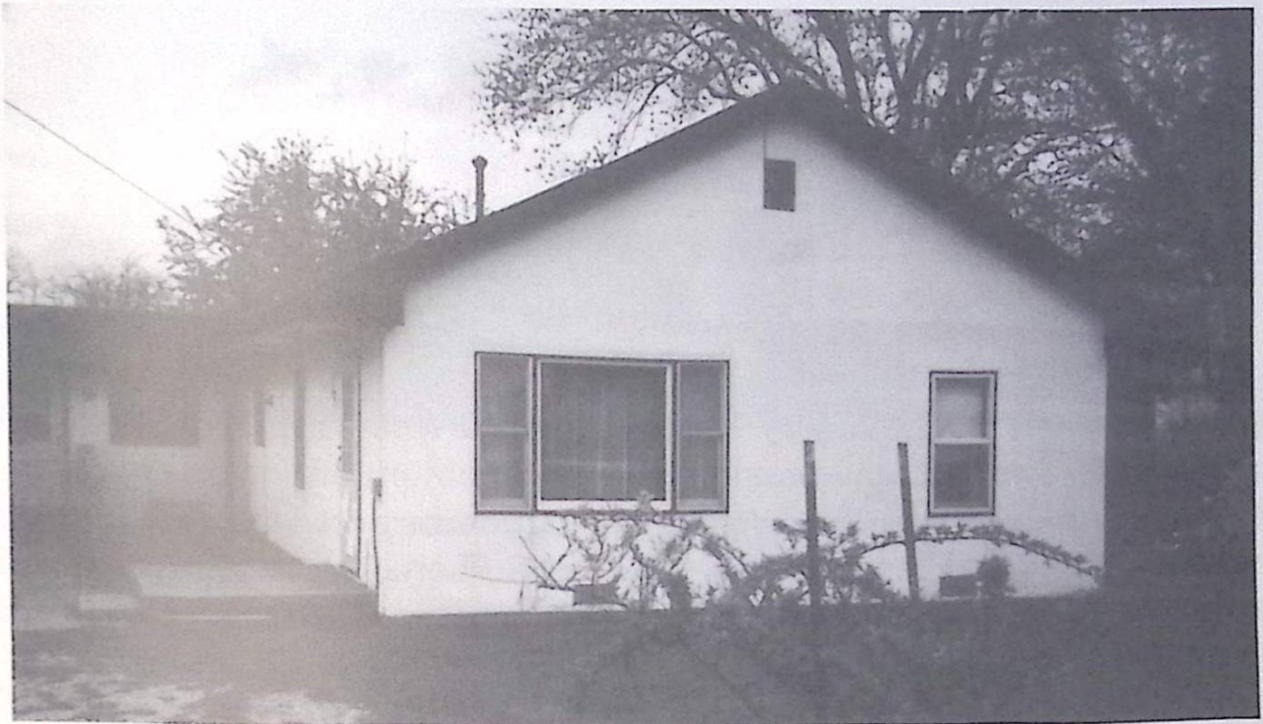
(Lorene Stokes Vander Linden)

Durfee School near Bussey. An example of overcrowding. 58 pupils are pictured.



The Thirty-Eighth General Assembly appropriated \$50,000 from the State Treasury for the support of education in the mining camps for the next two years. However, the amount proved to be inadequate, so the Thirty-Ninth General Assembly doubled that amount by appropriating \$50,000 annually for each of the next two years. (Ibid)

The first step in providing for classroom space was building two temporary one-room schoolhouses side by side for the lower grades. They still stand but are not recognizable as schoolhouses because they have been incorporated into very nice looking houses. Presently (1995), Mrs. Isabelle Marshall owns and lives in one of them, and Mrs. Mabel Moses Bausch in the other.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

First schoolhouse, Pershing, later incorporated into the home where Mabel Bausch now lives. (1995)

In April, 1921, a vote was taken to award a contract for the construction of an elementary school building in Pershing. Specifications for the proposed schoolhouse were drawn up. Voters in the district voted in favor of a \$25,000 schoolhouse. Walter Hawk of Harvey was awarded the contract, and by October 1921, he was ready to turn over the keys of the new building to the Pershing school board. A great day for Pershing, and another step in melding the people into a community.

It was a large elementary school with six classrooms and two other rooms - one a multi-purpose room where pupils ate their lunch and also used for



general meetings, and one room which served as living quarters for the principal and his wife the first year.



(Mabel Brady Bausch)

Pershing School, built in 1921. Later addition is the projection on left.

Even though the new school was large, it was not always large enough to accommodate the influx of students. Some were assigned to neighboring rural schools. The Victory School absorbed a few students from the north end of town. It was possible that students on one side of a street attended the new Pershing school, and the students across the road would be assigned to Victory School. Vigilance and Fairview rural schools also received part of the overflow. As was the case in most mining camps, Pershing never had a high school.

The Pershing students of high school age were transported by wagon to Attica High School about three miles south. Those who were involved do not speak highly of the transportation. Even though the wagon was covered by canvas, the ride was a dreadfully cold one in winter, and unpleasant when it rained. When Edna Fry (Moses) was in high school, a truck used for hauling cattle and hogs was used to transport the high school students, and she reports the smell was pretty overwhelming. For her, an interesting little sidelight was that on the way back from Attica to Pershing, the driver would stop and steal apples from an orchard at the side of the road.

Alas, Pershing almost lost its school a year after it was built. One February day in 1922, the fire alarm sounded, and the children marched out of the school in orderly manner, thinking it was a routine fire drill. This time, however, it was not a drill; it was the real thing! Fire had burst



forth in the basement from an overheated chimney and had gained considerable headway.



(Edna Fry Moses)

Pershing School, 4th grade, 1925. Front Row: (L-R) Harry Russell, Albert Miller, Delno Jones, Merle Barnhill, Ed Sedlock, Verna Pregon, Lena Leggett, Dave Moses. Second Row: Chet Lapp, Lucille Pyle, Dorothy McDowell, Kathryn Mediate, Estella Goring, Pearl Leair, Edith Delazzer, Alberta Reed. Third Row: Mildred Harrison (teacher), Inez Moss, Sarah Jones, Isabelle Nichols, Andrew Rickett, Marie Maddy, Alice Israel, Leota Cecil. Fourth Row: Rosie Barnhill, Carmella Provenzano, Mary Jane Neagle, Alberta Stokes, Wilma Nicholson, Lillian Miller, Edna Fry. Fifth Row: Pete Cecil, Elwood Patterson, Victor Delazzer, Dale Barnhill, Boyd Wolfe, Merel Turnipseed.

Principal Templeton, after seeing all of the children safely out of the building, grabbed a bucket of water and ordered the janitor and the eighth grade boys to follow with other buckets and tubs filled with water. Mr. Templeton ran ahead and dashed the water he carried into the flames which checked them considerably. With the water the eighth grade boys brought, the flames were soon extinguished. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 2/15/22)

Pershing people considered themselves most fortunate, for in the absence of a fire department, almost every time a fire started, the building burned to the ground.





(Mabel Bausch)

Teachers at Pershing, late 1920s. (L-R) Mr. Woods, Fay Paulding, Miss Tagert, Miss Hill, Crea Davis, Isabelle Nicholson, Mr. A.W. Archer.

A more glorious moment for the school, and the community was the announcement that there would be a banquet at the Miners' Hall on Friday, May 16, 1923, for the 8th grade graduates followed by commencement exercises in the Opera House (also located in Miners' Hall). The baccalaureate sermon would be delivered at the Latter Day Saints' Church on Sunday at 7:30.

### Street and Town Maintenance

Inasmuch as Pershing was an unincorporated town, there was no way to raise taxes for improvements or maintenance. Time and again, Pershing was a big mudhole after a period of rainfall, inconvenient and unsanitary. (It was so muddy in Pershing in April, 1923, that the Company store sold a wagon load of boots in two hours' time.)

The streets were considered the responsibility of the Coal Company, and they outwardly accepted this responsibility, but then did little about it. The spring of 1923 was an especially wet one and lack of progress in providing sidewalks and cleaning up the garbage were reported in the *Knoxville Express*, as follows:



April 17, 1923. "The Company expects to haul off all tin cans and rubbish this week and will begin grading the streets as soon as possible."

April 28, 1923, "There has been agitation for sidewalks for some time, and the Union passed a motion to assess each miner living in Pershing one dollar to help pay the expenses of putting them in."

Apparently, the Company was stung by the proposed Union action, so they answered, "The Company will grade the streets and put in walks at their own expense. All they ask of the miners is a little help just to show that they appreciate the walks and have an interest in them so that they will not be destroyed. It will cost quite a sum to do this work, and if they are not taken care of, it will be useless to put them in."

"The rain is over and gone, and spirits rose once again," according to the *Knoxville Express*, May 10, 1923. "Pershing is enjoying prosperity in every way. There is quite a boom in building. The people nearly all have their gardens in. The Pershing Coal Company is grading off the streets and hauling off the rubbish. With the general clean-up of the town we have a place to boast of. The camp is taking on the look of a prosperous town. It has outgrown the stage of a camp. Truckers coming in are asked not to ride on the grass or walks."

But in the fall of 1923, Pershing was again a sea of mud. The parents complained that their children had to wade through the mud and cold water to get to school, and that they were getting sick. They were angry about the Company's failure to remedy the situation.

## Utilities

One of the best bits of news in August, 1925, was that a power line from Knoxville to Pershing was going up. Finally, electricity would be available to the community. It helped to be a part of the mining system, which is a big market for electricity. The mine would be served first, hopefully by October. The line was planned for going through old Andersonville, then past the Liberty School, and then through Pershing to the mine, which is 3/4 mile east of Pershing. Electricity for the town was promised by the first of January. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 9/3/25)

However, it would be many years before running water and sewage disposal would be a part of Pershing. The outhouse would be a part of Pershing's backyard scenery for a long time to come.



## Early Reactions With Respect to Pershing

In general, the Pershing miners were very happy with their lot in Pershing. They accepted the undesirable features as facts of existence. They knew how much better off they were than people in some nearby mining camps. The miners did not know it at the time, but the '20s in Pershing were their "Golden Years" - or as some might say, their "Salad Days!"

The farmers who lived around felt too that the miners were well off. The farmers envied and resented the better living conditions the miners had. The '20s were a poor time for farmers for during the post World War I period, grain prices and land values had turned sour, and many had lost their land.

The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) had protected the miners. It had obtained higher wages for the miner, and if miners were out of work, they could go on welfare. The farmers had no such cushion. They were not organized.

Furthermore, the miners seemed to have a different philosophy concerning money - many indulged in conspicuous spending. They wore silk shirts and stylish hats. They attended the dances week after week. They seemed not to worry about that "down and out" syndrome that often accompanies spending every cent one has.



## Chapter 11

# RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL, AND RECREATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN PERSHING

A look at the long list of ambitious cultural events held and recreational opportunities offered in the earliest days of Pershing's existence supports the claims of the promoters who said it would be a model, ideal town. It also supports the citizens' belief in the permanence of the town. The Pershing miners were exuberant about the future - Pershing would not disappear from the map in a few years as most mining camps did. Maybe there was just a bit of a desire to vindicate the fact that miners were every bit as cultured as the farmers of the area, not "underground savages," as evidently some called them.

Many of the cultural and recreational events offered would not have been possible without a large multi-purpose building for meetings. The Pershing three-story Miners' Hall was the Union's invaluable contribution to community life. It was intended first of all as a place for Union meetings, but it also provided space for dances, banquets, lodge meetings, school programs, eighth grade graduations, basketball games, shooting pool, a small library, movies, and musicals. It was everybody's building, the center of community life. Without its wonderful facilities, Pershing might have been socially and culturally malnourished.

Unfortunately this building burned down in May, 1930. A miners' hall was so essential that in four months' time, another one - 30 x 60 feet in size - was being constructed, this time with only one story and a basement. At one end of the Hall, there was a stage with dressing rooms. This building, like the first one, would be used for dances, school meetings, social activities, lodge meetings, and, of course, Union meetings. But it would never equal that first Miners' Hall.

During its first few years, Pershing had to generate its own recreational and social activities right in their own town, for few people had automobiles, and the roads were in very poor condition.

### Churches

As in most American communities, Pershing people felt the need of a place where they could worship God. Four or five groups established churches in those first few years, but some of them did not survive very long.



Today the Zion Methodist Church is a conspicuous feature on Road G62 leading into Pershing. It existed before Pershing and the mining days came into being, and it has been a place of worship ever since.

Samuel and Rebecca Rogers came into the area in 1854 and secured land for a farm. As other settlers came in, they met at the Rogers' home for religious services, and they buried their dead on a corner of the Rogers' land. In 1865, members of the group built the first Zion Methodist Episcopal Church on the Rogers' land. In 1867 the Rogers transferred the land to the trustees of the congregation for a sum of \$40.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Zion Methodist Church. Zion Cemetery is back of church.

The Zion Cemetery, which lies back of the church, is a mute record of many years of the history of this place. At least two Indian graves are in the cemetery as well as graves of early settlers and farmers through the years, and miners and their families. It is well kept and beautiful with many large trees planted on it. It has become a large cemetery owing to the influx of miners beginning in 1919.

Although the church and its cemetery are now at least a mile out of town, and it therefore appears to be a country church, it looked quite different during the heyday of the mining era. Then, houses extended in a solid row from the town to the church and beyond.

When Pershing #12 was developed in 1919, special care was taken to skirt the cemetery and to avoid digging underneath it and the church. The blueprint of the mine shows that this was the plan. However, one of the



bosses of the mine did not want to be buried in Zion Cemetery. Apparently, he knew the true situation as to the extent of the mine, and he feared subsidence of the land.

It was said that the farmers who had established the Zion Church did not make the miners feel too welcome until much later, and by that time many had chosen to attend the Union Church or churches in Knoxville.

The Zion Church was prominent enough to warrant a Regional Sunday School Convention in May, 1923. The meetings were held in Miners' Hall, and the children were meanwhile cared for in Zion Church.

Zion Church has always had an active Sunday School. The young people met for Epworth League for evening sessions. On March 15, 1923, as an example, the topic for discussion was, "What Jesus expects of me."

In 1926, a new church was built on the same site, and it has been well maintained. Today, the church shares a minister with Attica. He holds services at Attica at 10 a.m. and at Pershing at 11. The attendance is small, sometimes numbering only 20, and is made up principally of older folk who remain loyal to this church, even though they may live in Knoxville or another town.

The only other sign of a church today is a dilapidated building which is situated on Pershing's main north-south street. It was originally a Church of the Latter Day Saints, formally opened in November, 1921, with 30 members. They held services every Sunday morning at 10:30. Later it became a Catholic church. After the mines were closed and Pershing's population dwindled, the church was abandoned and its remaining members went to Catholic churches in other places, mainly Knoxville. For a time, the building served as a youth center, but it is now closed and is in rather bad condition. It would be a truly historical reminder of the great old Pershing if it could be saved and renovated.

In November, 1923, a strong active non-denominational church, the Union Church, was organized starting as just a Sunday School. At first, they met in the Miners' Hall. Both parents and children were invited. By December, they had developed Bible classes for both men and women, had organized an orchestra, held a Christmas bazaar, and presented a Christmas program with 150 members present. A Rev. Supplee was a visiting minister, who evidently lived in another place, because it is reported how much his congregation appreciated the fact that he came every Sunday even if he had to walk through the mud to get there.





(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Old Church in Pershing, later used as a Youth Center. Presently it is abandoned.

The Union Church people were very active in promoting fund-raising events for carpeting and other furnishings for their church - as well as inviting and getting people interested in coming to their services.

In October, 1925, the Pentecostal Association was formed. They were fortunate in that the Zion Methodist people were wanting to build a new church and offered to donate the old building to them if they would move it off the premises. Again the Pentecostals were fortunate. The Pershing Fuel Company donated land for the church. Revivals were important events in the Pentecostal Church. They sponsored good time social affairs too - some Sunday all-morning meetings ended with basket dinners.

When the blacks came into Pershing in 1927-28, many of them from old Buxton, they settled in South Camp, south of present-day Road G62. Whites lived north of that line in North Camp. The blacks were Baptists and had a Baptist minister come to preach at times, but they had no church of their own.



## Social Groups

It took no time at all for Pershing people to join Lodges which were everywhere quite the order of the day at that time. If one wanted to be "somebody" in society, one had to belong to a lodge.

The Red Men Lodge was organized in 1921 and immediately began vigorous campaigns for members ("palefaces"). Almost immediately they had signed up more than 50 members. In February, they celebrated the success of their drive by serving a banquet for 450 persons. After the dinner and ceremonies were over, they finished the evening with a Grand Ball, and they danced away the hours until daybreak.

In March 1921, the Pocahontas Lodge, the Women's Auxiliary of the Red Men, was organized with 57 charter members. A number of officers from Des Moines came to install the new officers (The Great Pocahontas, Great Keeper of Records, Collector of Wampum among them) and welcome the members into the lodge. After the officers were installed and business disposed of, light refreshments and dancing followed.

The men participated in the State Red Men Carnival in Knoxville in 1930 and also in a regional meeting in Knoxville with parades and floats from chapters in Des Moines, Knoxville, Pershing, Chariton, Pleasantville, and Melcher. These larger groups raised money for orphans and other charitable causes.

These two lodges evidently believed in having a lot of fun, and remained very active through the years. They sponsored many types of events - powwows (picnics) in the grove at Pershing followed by war dances, to which the general public was invited, had parades in which they marched through the streets of Pershing dressed in their resplendent uniforms, went to Chariton and other towns to initiate new tribes there, attended regional and State conventions, and made craft items for Christmas bazaars.

Other Lodges with chapters in Pershing were the Masonic Lodge and their Women's Auxiliary, the Eastern Star, and the Oddfellows and the Rebeccas.

The Masonic Lodge contributed to community betterment by arranging to have books from the Iowa Traveling Library displayed in their club rooms in Miners' Hall. On certain nights of the week, these rooms were open to the general public, who could come to read or to check out the books.



## Non-Lodge Social-Cultural Groups

The Jolly Club was the name of a group that sponsored dances and square dances. They had their own orchestra, but often engaged an orchestra from another town. Likewise, they went to neighboring towns to play. Their dances were immensely popular with people from Attica, Hamilton, Harvey, and Knoxville, as well as with the young folk from Pershing.

Evidently the young single men felt left out, for they also formed a dance club in 1925, and sponsored several dances with the Marigold Orchestra or the Marigold singers performing (evidently an outside group).

Pershing people loved to dance and were happy when the Red Men or the Jolly Club, or the Young Single Men's organization sponsored one. Miners' Hall was the site for a dance every Saturday evening. Masquerade dances, a Carnival dance, or a benefit dance for a miner who was ill or injured in the mines constituted special dances. Sometimes a group of young people attended dances at Buxton or Harvey - wherever there were miners.

Skating was almost as popular as dancing - and it was available even more often - Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday nights and Sunday afternoon and evening. Parties from neighboring towns came to skate at George Ryerson's skating rink.

A different kind of a group - and perhaps the Pershing women were *avant-garde* - was organized as a weight reducing group in the early '20s. They hiked and rode bicycles (and hopefully dieted).

Seemingly, the women were more active politically than the men. After the 19th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution was passed in 1920, "and no person could be denied the right to vote on account of sex," Pershing women canvassed the homes explaining the voting process and urging women to go to the polls. Mrs. Ed Bregnaux conducted classes in citizenship for the Italian aliens in the community to prepare them for taking the examinations to become citizens of the United States.

Probably, it was related to the fact that the Pershing miners so loved to dance that in July, 1921, a group of players formed a band of 24 pieces. Before long they had a 60-piece band. They managed to find a leader from Lovilia, several miles to the south. They practiced in the Miners' Hall



every Wednesday. They assured the public that as soon as they had a couple of weeks practice, they would be ready to perform at fairs and other celebrations. They even played at a funeral when one of their members, 49-year old Henry West, was killed in a mine accident.

A special film, *Tho Old Oaken Bucket*, was given in the Opera House in Miners' Hall, the proceeds to go to the band boys.

Pershing lacked the amenity of a newspaper. But the *Knoxville Journal-Express* reported Pershing news so thoroughly that a local newspaper really was not necessary. Pershing people loved movies and the following ad in the *Knoxville Express*, March 26, 1922, heralds such a coming event:

FAMILY THEATRE  
PERSHING  
Thursday-Friday  
March 30-31  
Mark Twain's Great Comedy  
"The Greatest Satire in the History  
of Literature"  
2 big nights only  
Admission 25 and 50 cents

In September the "famous Harold Bell Wright's *Eyes of the World*" was to be shown at the Pershing theatre, and the next one was the 10-reel picture, *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

In August, 1922, the Red Men Lodge announced a seven-series schedule of balls, the first to be held the next Saturday, September 23.

The miners were evidently interested in a variety of educational and cultural events. The first number of a Lyceum (chautauqua) series given at Pershing in the fall of 1922 was a lecture given by Dr Frederick Gray on *The History of South America*. The second number of the Lyceum course was a concert by the Roray Entertainers with violin, banjo, viola, and horn. The next feature was a comedy play entitled *Sally*, which was given by the Vermont players. The fourth number was a musical to be performed in the Opera House. The various programs were attended by large crowds.

### Baseball

Likely, however, baseball was of more interest to Pershing people than



lyceum programs. The young men of the community had been playing baseball nights after the day's work in the mine was over. In early 1923, they decided to organize a team and to challenge other teams. They held a meeting in the Miners' Hall and elected a manager and a secretary. They said they expected to be the fastest aggregation in this part of the state (and they proved to be an exceptionally good team). They warned the surrounding ball clubs to look to their laurels as Pershing was out to win, and "failure" was not in their vocabulary.

The team immediately became active in raising funds for buying uniforms. They planned a benefit dance for the first day in April. They also sponsored a lawn social in the pasture across from the Miners' Hall. Most encouraging was the fact the businessmen of both Pershing and Knoxville and the Coal Company responded generously to help finance the new ball club. At the end of April, it was a great day when finally their uniforms arrived. The ground was dragged, and they were ready to play ball!

The first game on May 3, 1923, was unforgettable. Pershing played Olmitz (a mining camp in Lucas County) and won 4-0, three of the runs coming in the last half of the 8th inning. Pitcher George Gott was the hero of the game.

The Pershing baseball team showed up so well that first year that the Pershing fans were in a frenzy of excitement and pride. It was another way to show the world that Pershing really was an up-and-coming place, not just a little backwater mining camp.

Some of their first season games and results are recorded below. They won a game with Knoxville, 9-1. It was a real treat to play the Minneapolis Browns, a colored team, and win by a score of 9-3. In June, they played Fort Des Moines and won 5-3. They won over Waterloo. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds. But as must always happen, they eventually experienced their first loss - by Des Moines Erickson, 13-16 and then in a return game with Olmitz, they were beaten 0-3 (Pershing pitcher was sick). They lost to Pella 2-5 (the pitcher had a sore arm), and won from Buxton, a formidable team, 9-0. They lost to Mystic, 3-6 (Pershing team had eaten a big 3-course dinner before playing), beat Knoxville 5-0, beat Centerville 9-2. Pershing had a reputation for being a fine team with tremendous drive and had an especially great pitcher - George Gott.

One game reported in great detail by the Knoxville newspaper, 10/ 2/23, was a game with Glenwood. Their manager had written to Pershing to be sure to bring George Gott down, as he would draw a large crowd. Cheers



greeted Gott as he went on the mound. He was followed by a dainty little girl running across the diamond with a bouquet of flowers tied with a large dramatic bow. For a moment, he was stunned and forgot to remove his cap and acknowledge the audience. He was throwing wild for about five innings and the score stood 9-2 in favor of Glenwood. (She must have been a devastating little girl.)

In the sixth inning Gott rallied and struck out the first three men up to bat. In the seventh, five men faced him with only one score. Pershing also ran one score in the 7th. In the 8th Pershing scored 4 runs, and one in the 9th. Alas, the final score was 10-8 in favor of Glenwood; Pershing needed another inning or two.

But enough of scores. In the early 1920s, Pershing was known all over the area for its fine team and especially for its great pitcher - George Gott. It was said that in the ensuing years, great pitchers for Pershing were young men from either the Gott or the Moses families.

As the years went by, other athletes took the place of those early heroes. In the late 20s, for example, young Tom Rowland was the star of the team.

A strong desire to have their own team motivated the colored young men in South Camp to organize the Pershing Cubs. They were acclaimed and their team pictured in the *Knoxville Journal Express* of June 30, 1932. The team consisted of Floyd White, Carl Rumley, John Burket, Harvey Rumley, Charles King, Isaiah Lewis, Virgil Singleton, Clyde Wright, Levin Burkett, Zeph Singleton, P. Abington, J.D. Tucker, Mgr., and L.L. Walker, Coach.

Meanwhile, the original Pershing team called themselves the P-Ks because for a time, at least, they had joined forces with the Knoxville team.

### Tennis and Other Games

One July evening in 1923, 20 people got together to organize a tennis club. They talked about tennis courts as part of a playground which would be arranged for later. They planned to have slides, swings, bars, and teeter boards for children. Happily, Mr. E. Love, manager of the Pershing Fuel Company, backed the drive. One evening soon after, the group organized a lawn social and music for lawn dances in order to raise funds for the playground.



## Hunting and Fishing

For some men, the best way to spend the summer was to go fishing. The Coal Company stocked a pond near Pershing with pike, bass and catfish. And in the fall, duck hunting was good on this pond.

Farther away, Bellefontaine and Eveland on the Des Moines River in Mahaska County were favorite fishing spots. Work in the mines was usually slack in the summer, and income fell off. Fishing was a pleasurable way to spend one's time, and at the same time, provide meat for the table. Camping along the river and fishing (and throwing a ball around) made for perfect summer days.

## Illegal Pleasures

The 18th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution passed in 1918 "prohibited the manufacture or sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors," which, if obeyed, would make it impossible to obtain. Some found the prohibition amendment lucrative to their purposes. Making "hooch" was a way of making a supplementary income. It is doubtful whether anyone in Pershing who wanted to drink would have difficulty in finding it. It was just that the new law made it a bit of a nuisance to get it.

Whether the Pershing miners indulged more heavily in liquor than the population of an average town of that size is difficult to evaluate. Opinions are mixed. It is known, however, that Pershing was raided many times by Federal and State agents. Enormous amounts of liquor stashed away and the discovery of hidden stills were reported by the newspapers from time to time. At one time, it was reported in 1925 that the "largest haul of liquor ever made in Marion County took place in Pershing. Of the 15 houses investigated, 10 were found with intoxicating liquor. Various miners spent time in jail. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 10/1/25)

One clever attempt to circumvent the officers who were looking for a hidden still was that of excavating a large room under a coal seam of four feet in thickness and operating a still down there - using stolen rubber pipes and kettles. But the officers found it, and turned the perpetrators over to the grand jury.

Other stills were found in thick brush, or in the slope of a hill that had been mined and abandoned, and doubtless in many other secret places. A



lot of beer was wasted by pouring it into the ground when it was noised about that the officers were coming.

On the road going south out of town and around a curve in the road was a section called Huntsville, where there was a great deal of carousing - gambling and heavy drinking, "Sin City."

Wives tell stories of their husbands coming from the mine with their pay checks and never getting home with them. The children were hungry while their fathers were losing their money gambling. One desperate wife tells of going to the place where her husband was gambling, having already lost \$10. She demanded of the winner that he give it to her or she would report it to the cops. He did give it to her. Unfortunately, most wives would not have dared to brave the scorn of the men present - or their husbands' wrath.

Though the majority of the men in Pershing were fathers who cared for their children and did not drink excessively, now and then violent acts were committed by men while under the influence of liquor.

One fine summer day in 1934, Frosty Waters went wild after a few drinks and proceeded shooting up the town. He shot two dogs and a steer and damaged several homes by blowing out a window here and there. Finally, he was overpowered when his brother-in-law hit him over the head with a club. They bound him with ropes and notified the sheriff. At the hearing, Waters said he would never drink again.

When the vote went to the people in 1933 as to whether or not to repeal the 18th Amendment, Pershing's vote for repeal was 172 votes, and their vote against repeal was 47, one of the largest percentage votes for repeal in Iowa. (*Knox. JI-Exp.*, 6/15/33)

The Pershing people evidently had lots of energy left after hard days in the mines and had good times together. It was amazing how quickly they formed a close-knit community and organized so many diverse activities that everyone regardless of his/her tastes could find something that was enjoyable.



## Chapter 12

# THE PERSHING MINER'S LIFE

Doubtless the men who worked in the mines and their families, too, felt that they were like pawns of the Pershing Fuel Company. There were not many decisions they could make about their working life - except to move away. Yet, overall, they appeared to be happy with Pershing.

A succession of whistles governed their lives. They could be heard as far away as Harvey or Bussey.

At 7 a.m. the whistle told the men (women were prohibited by law to work in the mines as were children under 12 years of age) that it was time to begin the day's work. The men gathered quickly around the shaft to await their turn at the elevator.

At noon, the whistle told them that they could now eat their lunches. They got out their lunch boxes which had layered compartments. The bottom layer was for water, drinking water as well as water for their carbide lamps. Their food was in the layer above that, a small part sectioned off for a piece of pie.

At 3:30, the whistle announced whether or not there would be work the next day - three blasts meant "yes," and one meant "no."

Sometime after 4 p.m., if the whistle blew two times, it meant that the shot firers had gotten out of the mine safely after lighting their dynamite or black powder. Obviously, shot firers had a dangerous job. They stayed in the mine after the other miners had left to set off the explosive that would loosen the coal so that the miners could shovel it into cars the next morning.

The dreaded whistle which could occur at any time of the day was four blasts - which sounded like long wails to the apprehensive hearers. It meant that there had been an accident in the mine. Following it, women would gather out of doors and speak in hushed voices, anxiously waiting to hear who had been injured or killed, likely each one praying that she had not just been widowed. Life was stressful for both the wife and the children of the miner.



## **The Diggers - A Day In the Mine**

The diggers worked day after day, each in the room assigned to them - until all the coal was removed from that room. A room looked like a long narrow trench, 30 feet in width and usually about 200 feet in length. From the entry, the track for the cars led into the room, so that the filled coal car could be pulled by the mules over the tracks to the shaft.



(Leona Stokes Vander Linden)

Coal Miners In Pershing #12. (note carbide lights)

The diggers, perhaps next to the shot firers, had the most dangerous work. They worked in the rooms in pairs - often made up of brothers or father and son. They could look out for each other. If a father and son pair, the father could give his son pointers as to how to go about the work.

The first thing they did each morning was to probe the slate ceiling with a long metal prod in order to learn whether it was loose and would therefore need to be reinforced by extra timbers.

Several women interviewees said that their husbands had died because they had neglected to probe (sound) the ceiling. As a result, slabs of slate, sometimes weighing several tons, fell and crushed the miner underneath. Slate falls were the most common cause of accident. (Though always referred to as slate, the rock was really shale.)



Often there was a slight rumbling sound just before the slate fell, indicating a loose roof. Rats were very sensitive to this sound, and if rats came streaking through the mine, it was a warning the men had better heed. The mine mules also could hear the sound, and they balked at going into such an area.

A pick and a shovel were the only tools the diggers needed - they had to buy their own tools, and pay for having them sharpened by the mine blacksmith. They also had to supply their own blasting powder. The pick was used to pry or chop the coal loose so it could be shoveled into the waiting cars. The men might have to work on their knees (hence their padded clothing), sit in rather twisted positions, or even lie down when they used the pick. Except for lunch time, the men loosened coal and shoveled all day to get the coal into the coal cars. They did not 'sluff off' because diggers were paid according to the tons of coal they mined.

Orbra Geery, Harvey, who worked for many years in the Pershing coal mines writes of the drudgery, the dangers, and the discomforts of working in the mines.

"Every time I see a coal car I think of all the hard work it was to fill it with coal, sometimes as many as 18 to 20 times a day. Coal cars held from 1 to 1 3/4 tons.

To drill three to six feet in the coal with a hand drill, then load with blasting powder, to clean the roof up after the shots went off, to beat it up with a sledge, sometimes four or five tons or more, to set up wooden props six feet long and several inches in thickness, to keep the roof from falling down, all this was not an easy job. If you didn't know how to sound your roof you didn't last long. You did all your work with a little carbide light on your head with a flame about an inch long.

There is no dustier or darker place than an underground coal mine. I guess it was so dark we couldn't see the dust, but we knew the air was bad because our arms got so heavy, we could hardly lift them. At times the air was so bad you couldn't keep your dinner down. Sometimes, the bad air took the miners' lives." (O. Geery, 1995)

Mine accidents were numerous and frequent. In 1939, there were ten mining deaths in 110 days, and one miner was seriously injured. Most of the accidents in the mines were due to slate falls from the ceiling, but





(Orbra Geery)

Orbra Geery, with typical miner's attire: carbide light on his cap, trousers with leg padding for comfort when lying against coal face, boots for protection against water in the mines. He is carrying a dinner pail in his arm in typical miners' manner. He could be termed "Mr. Miner" as he was a digger, timber man, laid track, prospect driller, drove mules, ran the hoist, and was a foreman.

others were due to powder or dynamite explosions, mule runaways, accidents at the shaft, getting crushed between the moving cars, or being knocked down and killed under the cars.

Other hazards of the mine were related to gases in the air - black damp, which was heralded by the carbide light getting dimmer and dimmer. It meant GET OUT - the gas could cause an explosion - and white damp, which was heralded by the carbide light burning extra brightly - if the miner did not get some fresh air very soon, he would become unconscious and die shortly thereafter. He had simply suffocated. (White damp was the cause of death of five men in the O'Brien mine in Monroe County in March, 1953.)

The mine was required to have air shafts at intervals of 300 feet where fresh air was pumped into the mine as well as to have devices to keep the air moving, but it was always possible, of course, that some part of the air devices were not working.

When the day's work was over, the men came streaming out of the mines in long lines, winding their way homeward with dinner buckets under



their arms, a dramatic sight. Many of the men had yet to walk a long way before reaching home. They were relieved if the 3:30 whistle was blown three times - it meant the mines would be working the next day. They could go home happily.

### Mine Shutdowns

How frequently the mines were shut down. A three- or four- day working week was not uncommon. An amazing variety of reasons were given for closing the mine without warning - the dynamo was out of order; there was a squeeze in the main shaft; lightning had burned out the generator; lightning had burned out two switches; President Warren Harding's death in 1923, marked by a nationwide memorial so only three days that week; shortage of railroad cars, which meant that output of coal was greater than the means of transportation; surplus of coal on hand at that time; some process was necessary in the mine before work could go on (a neck or turn had to be made or a new entry had to be dug); and sometimes no reason at all was given. Summer time was particularly slack as there was little market for coal for home heating.

Pershing miners and their wives must have had their first big disillusionment relating to steady work when in 1922, a big cable broke and the cage dropped down until it hit safety devices part way down the shaft. The engine ran wild and began a rapid demolishment of the engine room before the engineer could get to the place where the steam valve could be turned off. As a result, 500 men were thrown out of work until the repairs could be made. A number of days elapsed before work could begin again. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 3/18/22)

Whatever the reason, the days when there was no work at the mine there was no income, and that caused hardship in the family. Even though mine work was hard and dangerous, too, the thought of days off was a disturbing one.

### The "List"

Perhaps the mine was working, but only at half production. The "List" included the names of those workers who were laid off, presumably temporarily, but whose names were placed on a list from which they would be hired in the order of their place on the list - when there were openings.



The "List" seemed a fair provision, but miners felt that favoritism was shown - that those who were friends of the bosses were able to get work. There were those who had been on the List for two years without being called. The men watched the working of the List with suspicion.

On one occasion 200 miners walked out to protest the hiring of Roxie Romeo, who had been near the top of the list, but then he left Pershing to work in another mine. He was rehired at Pershing, and he was at work as soon as his turn came up on the list. The miners claimed he should have been placed on the bottom of the list instead of being called when his name came up on the first list. The miners went back to work when officials of the Company said Romeo would be laid off. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 10/1/35)

### **The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)**

The miner was not powerless. The Pershing mine was a Union mine, as were all the big mines in Iowa; every worker belonged to the Union. Actually there were two powerful institutions who vied for power in Pershing - the Coal Company and the United Mine Workers of America. The Company made the decision concerning when the mines were to be working and decisions about housing and land rents as they owned all the land in Pershing, and they, therefore, made the provisions for the upkeep of the infrastructure for the town as well.



(Iowa Historical Society, Des Moines)

Headquarters, Iowa United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), Albia. It is presently used as the administrative building for the Albia School system.

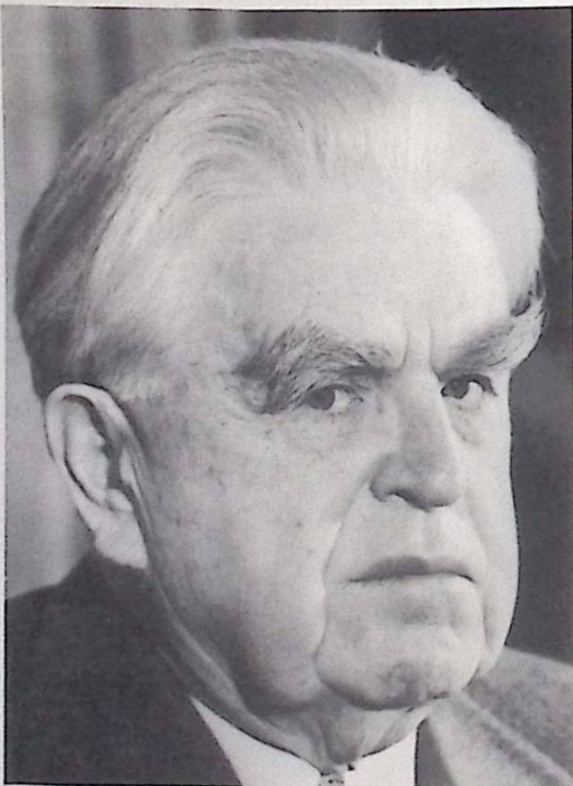


The Union worked for justice for the miner. Union headquarters in Albia, Iowa, heard the complaints of the miners by way of miners' local Unions. The Union fought for miners' rights in the Legislature. They called strikes to obtain better terms for the miners.

Almost to a man, ex-miners are strong believers in the Union. Jim Kerr recalls conditions in the Everist mine from 1906-1910 when men worked 10 hours a day for \$2.50 a day. They had to buy their own tools and powder, as well, lay their own track, set their own timbers, pick the dirt and slate out of the coal, blast and remove big rocks - all for nothing. He said that due to the Union and the strike they called in 1910, when 17,000 Iowa miners went on strike, conditions for the miners had improved mightily.

### John L. Lewis

The miners were proud of the part John L. Lewis, coal miner from neighboring Lucas County, played in their behalf. President of the UMWA, Lewis was their persistent, fearless defender. He had been a "trapper boy" - the boy who opens the doors to let the coal cars through the passage. He had been a miner; he was "one of them."



(Iowa Historical Society, Des Moines)

John L. Lewis, (1880-1969)  
Native of Lucas, Iowa, Powerful  
President, UMWA, 1920-59.

Lewis agonized for the "underdogs" in the mine, and he protested in their behalf. He organized almost half a million men across the country



into the UMWA, and in 1920 became its president. He was the most powerful labor leader in America. He had defied President Franklin D. Roosevelt's order to call off a strike during wartime. Lewis had refused, and instead he had forced FDR to grant mine workers important concessions. Lewis was their man!

Lewis was responsible for obtaining tremendous benefits for miners, among them pensions, as well as their own hospitals, and vast increases in wages. It was more than worth it to pay the dues the Union charged. Miners declare they would not have wanted to work in a non-union mine.

A spate of babies in the area were named Lewis in honor of their hero. Amusingly, in one family, however, the mother was strongly against naming their baby Lewis - she dreaded the strikes John L. called which worked such a hardship on the family - but the father prevailed. The child was named Lewis Dale. His mother always called him Dale, and his father called him Lewis.

### Bath Houses

A truly humanitarian gain fought for by the Union was the requirement that the mining companies provide bathhouses for their workers. The Legislature passed this bill in 1923 (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 4/26/23)

The Pershing Fuel Company promised to build a bath house as soon as possible. The bath house would be equipped with lockers and showers, with the water supply coming from the mine reservoir. As far as the miners were concerned, it could not be built too soon. They could bathe before going home.

Doubtless, their wives were ecstatic. Heretofore, it had been necessary that they have a tub of warm water ready in the kitchen for their husbands when they got home almost as black as the coal itself. With large families living in a small amount of space, there had been little privacy possible for the men. (It would have been wonderful if the Company had been required to launder the miners' clothing as well. The women recall the drudgery of having to wash their husbands' mine clothing on a washboard.)

It was an unhappy day when on Sunday, January 15, 1943, the bath house burned to the ground. With it the mine clothes of 150 men went up in smoke, for which they were never reimbursed. The loss on the building was covered by insurance.



It was a scramble to replace their clothing as the Knoxville stores had a limited amount of mining clothing at that time, and the same was true in other area towns. The mine stopped operations on Monday so that miners could "beg, borrow, or steal" something to wear so they could go back to work in the mines on Tuesday. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 1/20/44)

### Training in First Aid

Another beneficial change brought about by Union effort was the requirement that miners be provided with training in First Aid. A First Aid room was set up at the Pershing mine and was one of the few of its kind in the State. Equipment was ordered and installed under the supervision of Dr. Roy Moon of Attica.

A special car of the Bureau of Mines was set up at the railroad station in Knoxville as the setting for a Regional Miners' Meet. A short course on methods of safety in the mines was taught. The car was fully equipped to demonstrate how to use rescue apparatus to relieve broken back injuries and crushed limbs and electrical shocks. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 7/9/25)

The miners were soon able to use their newly acquired knowledge when on August 6, 1925, Thomas Coughlan, 29, Bussey, received a fractured spine and crushed ribs as a result of a fall of slate. In a short time the Pershing First Aid team had removed Coughlan from under the slate and rendered emergency treatment. He was brought to the surface and taken by automobile to the Miners' Hospital in Albia. He was pronounced to be in serious condition. After Dr. Gutch operated on him, he said that the man had a good chance to recover.

And what a happy ending when in late October, Tom Coghlin who had his back broken in August, was a Pershing visitor. He walked with crutches. But would he ever be able to work again? Some of the men who were injured, but not fatally, were doomed to helplessness all the rest of their lives, paralyzed from the waist down, or in other pitiable conditions.

Such a plight imposed a terrible burden on the family, too. Somebody had to care for these men.

It should be noted that there were no safety laws for small mines. As a result, more than twice as many deaths occurred in the smaller mines than in the larger ones. Coal laws did not apply to small mines - those that did not employ five or more. The State Mine Inspector had no laws to enforce - he could only warn that a mine was unsafe.



## **The Miners' Hospital at Albia**

Miners for many miles around, who had injuries that required a skilled surgeon were taken to the Miners' Hospital in Albia. Dr. Thomas Gutch of their staff had specialized in spinal disorders in his training in England. Slate fall injuries invariably resulted in a broken back, and Dr. Gutch was certainly the best doctor in the whole area for them.

Already in 1912, Dr. Gutch had devised a plan designed to help poor miners to pay their doctor bills. He collected \$1 a month per mining family, and for this \$1 Dr. Gutch provided full hospital, medical, and surgical care. Miners from many counties enrolled in his program; his services were so popular that he had 15,000 families in it. He had to develop a nurses' training school and an intern program in his hospital to take care of all his patients.

Shortages of personnel and supplies during World War II forced him to close the hospital.

Except for the high incidence of accidents, the years from the opening of the Pershing mine in 1919 to 1924 had been years of hard work but of comfortable living and good times. Life conditions were ever improving. Pershing was the best place where most of the miners and their families had ever lived.

The miners were making more money than the farmers. They were big spenders also. For the most part they were exuberant, and believed that improved conditions would ever continue.



## Chapter 13

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE PERSHING MINING CAMP

What did the women do all day while their husbands were down working below the ground? Theirs was not an easy life either.

### One Woman's Daily Schedule

This is how Mrs. Archie (Deborah) Moses played her part in her family. She had nine children to feed and clothe, keep clean and nurse when they were sick, as well as keep her house in order - a house which was much too small for such a large family, but somehow they all crowded into it.



(Edna Fry Moses)

Deborah and Archie Moses and  
grandson Ernest Moses. 1942

Washing for her family was quite an undertaking. The water had to be



pumped out of the well, carried to the house, and put into a large wash boiler (an oval kettle the length of two burners on the kitchen range). It took at least six pails of water to fill it. She put in some lye to soften the water and some pieces cut off a bar of P & G or homemade soap into the boiler, then heated the water until it came to a boil. Quite a lot of wood or coal was needed to get it to that point, and a lot of time, too.

While the water was heating, she washed the clothes - shirts, trousers, underwear as well as towels, bed linen, and diapers - all scrubbed on a wash board. After wringing them out, she placed them in the hot water in the wash boiler, then got the water to boiling again. After the clothes had boiled for a while, she took them out with a big stick, and placed them in a tub of clear, cold water to rinse out the soap. Then she had to wring them by hand, and finally the clothes were ready for the line. She could now proceed in the same manner for washing the dark clothes. As can be imagined, it was a very hot job, especially in the summer.

When she did get a washing machine, it had to be pumped by hand (a good job for the bigger children). What a tremendous improvement! Erma Long Darnell tells that the children in her family pumped the washing machine, too, and it took the whole day. In the summer, the children would move the washing machine from time to time to get it into the shade, and by the end of the day, they had gone all the way around the house.

There was no such fabric as polyester; the clothes needed to be ironed, which Deborah did using a flat iron, heated on the stove. So stoke up the kitchen stove again. Eventually she got an electric iron, but when there was a layoff at the mine as there usually was in the summer, and there was no money coming in, the family turned off the electricity, and she had to go back to the old flat iron again.

When Deborah's children were growing up and dating, she sometimes had 21 white shirts to wash and iron. Collars and cuffs had to be starched in hot starch water. Pillow slips were starched before ironing them. She ironed the diapers and dish towels. Washing and ironing days were the hardest days of the week.

Two days a week she baked bread. The men who worked in the mine carried their lunches, which helped to account for the large bread consumption. Needless to say, the daily cooking for 11 people and the dish-washing took up a large part of each day.



Like most of the Pershing women, Deborah scrubbed her floors diligently, using the water from washing the clothes. And as for most women, waxing the floors was important. Both scrubbing and waxing the floor was done on her knees.

Water for her husband's bath must be warm around 4 o'clock when he came home from the mine. In the summer time, just placing a tub of water outdoors in the sun did the trick.

In the summer, she planted and hoed their large garden. The children worked, too, and so did her husband if he were off from the mines and had no other work. She canned quantities of vegetables from the garden and fruits from their orchard (another very hot job).

Storage was almost non-existent in her house, and what to do with canned foods was a problem. She solved it by lining up the jars under the beds. Once, unfortunately, the canned raspberries exploded, and the smell of raspberries pervaded the house for years. Another time all their canned tomatoes blew up.

In addition to all those domestic duties, Deborah Moses was a midwife. She delivered many, many babies in Pershing. She had nine babies of her own before she had a doctor. Then, a law was passed that a woman must have a doctor. After delivering a baby and getting it taken care of, she went every day for ten days to bathe that baby and take on other tasks around the house. In those days, every woman who had a baby stayed in bed for ten days after the birth (what a blessed rest that period must have been).

### **Women's Position and Relationships**

A woman did not get out of town very often. However, she didn't expect that it was her right to do so. Most of the women had married a neighbor boy or someone from some other part of Pershing. In the earliest days of Pershing's existence, hardly anyone had an automobile, so a spouse must necessarily come from one's own village. A young married woman's parents likely lived next door or a few blocks away. She continued the type of life her mother had lived.

Relationships with parents and with friends a woman had known from childhood remained strong, and she received emotional as well as material support from them when in need.



The women met with their women friends frequently for a coffee time or a good talkfest. Many of them had been lifelong friends. They also attended Lodge meetings and parties and dances in the Miners' Hall at night.



(Lorena Stokes Vander Linden)

Pershing women enjoy getting together, 1933. Front row: Lucy Hart, Germaine Harty, Mary A. Stokes, Lottie Long, Lena Robuck. Back Row: Mrs. Johns, Mrs. Tom Rowland, Molly Hart, Mrs. Neagle, Jennie Nicholson, Olive Pearl, and Irene Smith.

They had their Atwater Kent radios. If they had to stay home at night with the children, they could listen to Amos and Andy, or Fibber McGee, Jack Benny, The Hit Parade, or a baseball game. A favorite song they listened to time and again was *A Dream of the Miners' Child*. But it revived a frightening thought they tried not to think about.

According to several people interviewed, most of the miners were good husbands and fathers. Perhaps they did not help much around the house, but they had done back breaking work all day. The children, if they were old enough to do so (and many of them worked hard while still quite young), were expected to help clean the house, take care of the younger kids, run errands and carry water and fuel, and many other tasks.



Unfortunately, as is true everywhere, there were husbands who gambled away their checks, came home drunk, or were unfaithful to their wives. One woman tells of giving her husband a quarter to go to the grocery store for some bread for supper. When he did not come back, she went around town asking for him. She was told he had gone into a certain house. She burst in and found him in bed with the woman of the house. She reported that she had marched up to the bed and said, "Give me back my quarter." He did, and she took off for the store.

As she said, "My husband was no jewel." Later he was killed in a slate fall in the mine while he and she were still in their twenties. She married another man, who was a better spouse than the first.

The women who had the hardest lives were those whose husbands had been killed or injured in the mine. If the husband was killed and had left her with several little children, she most likely had to go out and work in other peoples' houses, washing, ironing, or taking in single miners as boarders. If the husband was injured, she might have a helpless invalid on her hands the rest of her life. From then on, life was hard and dreary.

Life was hard also when there were layoffs at the mine, or strikes that perhaps kept their men at home for long weeks or months. Women even dreaded the whistle signal that meant, "No work tomorrow." Even the loss of one day's pay made life a little more difficult.

The children enjoyed their summer evenings outside playing games. At times, they extended the hours they could see to play by lighting a bonfire at the end of the lot. They went to the movies in the Miners' hall and usually in addition to the main feature, there was a serial being shown like Tarzan, for example. A child could not miss a single chapter of that exciting story.

Though the women worked very hard, they enjoyed seeing their children having fun, their women friends, and the support of their husbands.



## Chapter 14

# THE OMINOUS EFFECTS OF STRIKES

Unfortunately, for almost every benefit the Union achieved for its members, there had to be a strike, and it was hardly possible to determine how much was gained in the end. The strikes cost the Company in lost work and hence profit, they cost the miner in lost wages, and they cost the coal consumers of the community from having adequate heating and lighting for their houses.

### **Consumers Suffer During a Coal Strike**

Pella was an example of a suffering community when the large mines of the area were on strike in the fall and winter months of 1919. There were only two mines near town which were not on strike. One which was about seven miles from town produced about 70 tons a day. It was a particularly cold winter, and icy roads made it impossible for a teamster to bring in more than one load of coal a day.

The town appointed a fuel administrator, P.H. Van Gorp, to decide who would get the small amount of coal available.

Mr. Van Gorp decided that the Public Library must close its doors, the churches must reduce their consumption by one-half - in fact, he urged them to join with other churches for their services in order to save coal; the stores' business hours were curtailed; and big users such as Central College and public schools must reduce their consumption drastically. He announced that no one who had one ton of coal on hand would be allowed to have coal delivered to his home except by his orders.

In December temperatures dropped to -20 degrees, and big snow drifts made it hard to get to the mines. Even the mines came under Van Gorp's control, because he decided which roads to the mines were to be cleared first.

### **Non-Striking Miners**

Perhaps the only winners in a general strike situation were the small non-unionized mines which continued to work and sell coal during strike periods.



In June, 1922, during a short strike for higher wages, the Union set up a campaign to shut down all "gopher" mines, as the small non-unionized mines were called. Striking miners were encouraged to band together to force small mines to shut down. Several hundred miners from Pershing, McCagg, Andersonville, and Flagler, in dozens of automobiles, met in Knoxville one morning to go to visit small mines around the area. A sort of carnival feeling prevailed as a large delegation of women and children came to Knoxville in a large bus, with flags waving, to bid their husbands Godspeed on their mission.

The cavalcade of autos kicked up the dust and started off. They visited several mines in the east part of the County, stopped their cars some distance from each mine, got out and walked. Needless to say, the three to five men working in each mine were frightened to see around 200 men approaching them. But the approaching strikers were neither armed nor intoxicated. They simply asked them quietly to stop work. In every instance, the miners laid down their tools. The mission was 100 per cent successful - and such an easy solution. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 6/28/22)

### End of 1922 Strike

However, the strike lasted longer than first expected, and the merchants in Knoxville said they were hard hit. They had extended all the credit they possibly could. Furthermore, Knoxville's industries needed coal if they were to carry on.

Various miners went elsewhere to find work. Finally in desperation, in the latter part of August, the miners agreed to return to work under the old pay scale and under the same conditions.

Some of the mines in the County were in bad condition because of non-use and had to have work done on them before they could start up again. In Pershing, 550 men went back to work. They were happy to go back but hadn't gained anything. (*Knox Jl-Exp.*, 9/23/22) The good news was that in September the mine had 622 men on the roll, a record number. Pershing was still in the throes of prosperity.

Yet, the *Knoxville Journal-Express* continued to carry disquieting rumors." Despite four strikeless years, there has been a steady decrease in annual product." (10/28/26) Actually, the highest year of production was 1917 - during World War I.



One reason for the decrease in demand was competition with coal from Illinois and Indiana. Though Iowa coal burned with an intense heat because of its sulphur content, its sulphur content was what made it undesirable to many consumers. It was not as clean a coal - black smoke and a great deal of coal dust and ashes resulted from the burning of Iowa coal. Old-timers say that in winter the snow banks would be entirely black with coal cinders.

Iowans were urged by business men and by the Governor of Iowa to support the Iowa coal industry, and thus the Iowa economy by burning Iowa coal. Huge advertisements to this effect appeared in Iowa newspapers. Little by little, the Illinois and Indiana and Appalachian coals were stealing the market. When it became known that even the railroads (who owned the big coal mines) were turning to Illinois coal and later that they were using diesel fuels to power their engines, the mine operators were angry and realized that the situation was ominous.

### **The Strike of 1927- The Beginning of the End**

Incredible to the miners was the Pershing Fuel Company's announcement in March, 1927, to the effect that conditions were such that they would be able to pay only \$5.00 a day instead of the \$7.50 presently being paid. The new wage scale was to go into effect April 1, 1927. The Company would keep the mines open only if the workers agreed to accept this offer.

The announcement came to the miners as a shock - as if a bomb had been dropped upon them. It had never occurred to them that there was any way for wages to go but up.

The new proposed wage would mean a substantial lowering of standard of living. Many of the miners were laid off during the summer and worked only seven or eight months a year. They needed high wages when they did work.

The reality of the matter was that costs of coal mining were getting ever higher. If a coal company wanted to compete, it had to have more sophisticated, costly equipment. Since miners' wages constituted a high proportion of total costs, the mine operators felt that the only way they could make any profits was to lower wages. The \$7.50 a day wage had started in 1917 during World War I, when wages were unnaturally high, and that situation no longer existed.





(Mabel Bausch)

Foreman Tom Rowland, Daughter Leona (right) and friend, in front of Tipple #12, 1927.



Both sides had their economic problems. It was an impasse.

Joe Harris, President of District #13, UMWA, in Albia counseled the miners to strike, and they did. The miners laid down their picks at midnight, March 31, 1927, and agreed not to pick them up again until the \$7.50 daily wage was restored.

All of Iowa's miners (and Illinois miners, too) faced the same situation. Nine thousand miners in Iowa walked out of their mines. They did not realize how serious the outcome would be. The 1927 strike which would last from April 1, 1927, to October 6, 1927, was to "break the back" of the coal mining industry.

### **The Plight of the Miners During a Strike**

On May 19, 1927, when the strike had been in effect for six weeks, the *Melcher Union* commented on the effects of the strike on the miners. Excerpts from this article follow:

"The miners of Marion County are tightening their belts and settling down to a long wait for the end, which must inevitably come. They are determined to wait for two years if necessary before they will take less than \$7.50 a day.

The miners and their wives may be seen working every day in large gardens. With no work, their credit at the Company store ceases. Only one course is open to them. They must find their own food.

Each day large numbers of men may be seen trooping off to the nearest stream to catch their meat for the day. If the strike lasts through the winter, the rabbit population will be seriously depleted.

The first rule of the miners is that the women and babies must not suffer. The Union funds stored up for a strike will provide milk for the babies, but other than that the miners will not ask for aid. They felt those miners who had suffered injury in the mines or sickness should be cared for by Union funds.

Many of the miners secure other positions. Some of them find work as common laborers, and farmers' hired men. But they will not work in any coal mine while the strike is on."



It was a surprise when in October, 1927, five months after the strike had begun and miners were almost exhausted, not only financially but mentally also, certain mine owners conceded to the miners' demands. They agreed to pay the \$7.50 a day (effective until April 1, 1928) demanded by the miners. Mining started up again, at first in the Vancenbrock and Hayes Brothers mines, then at Pershing, Marysville, and Bussey mines in Marion County.

The costs of the strike were high. Some mine owners never did quite recover from this strike, and their output began to decline. In Centerville in Appanoose County, violence erupted because scab workers had been hired during their absence, and miners dynamited the mine putting it in complete darkness. Really shocking was the fact that the mighty Buxton Consolidation #18 in neighboring Monroe County was precipitously closed one day in October, 1927, with hundreds of cars of coal still standing at the bottom of the mine. They never did open again. It was the end of Buxton.

The repercussions of the Buxton mine shutdown and the scattering of its people were experienced in Pershing.

In 1927-28, miners from Buxton were the first blacks to obtain employment in Pershing #12 mine. They chose homes in South Camp (south of Highway G62), whereas the whites lived in North Camp, across the road.

By 1995, most of these families had moved away. One family, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Rumley, some of their children and grandchildren remained. They are highly regarded in the community.



## Chapter 15

# FROM RICHES TO RAGS IN THE DISTRESSING THIRTIES

The early days in Pershing were the golden days of full employment, hope, expansion, exuberance, good times, big spending. The early '20s were not so bright for the farmers, however, they were losing their lands to the banks and insurance companies as falling prices and overexpansion of investments brought about harder times and economic ruin in some cases. They envied the miners.

After the long 1927 strike coupled with the use of alternate types of fuel, mechanization which brought trucks into competition with the railroads, the national economic crisis, and government legislation regulating rail rates and coal prices, the coal mining industry was plunged into deep crisis.

### Distressing Signs of Change

Five months after the end of the 1927 strike and the reopening of Pershing #12, Pershing people were horrified to learn that the Pershing Savings Bank had been closed by the State Banking Department. In their memories, banks had never closed before; they were institutions one could depend on and trust. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.* 3/28/28)

Equally chilling news was the fact that in 1931, the First Trust and Savings Bank of neighboring Melcher was closed and turned over to the State Banking Department. Before long, banks closings became common. What were people who had to depend on cash to meet all their needs now going to do? (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 7/30/31)

With very little fanfare this time, the miners and operators agreed on a minimum daily wage scale of \$5.80 per hour (quite a drop from the \$7.50 rate they had worked so hard to get). It was to last for the next 18 months. Doubtless, the miners had no strength left to fight - and the signs told them that they had better take what they could get. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.* 10/2/28)

The status of coal mining was on everyone's mind. Iowa Governor John Hammill was a visitor at the Pershing mine. He met with miners, mule



drivers, and other employees of the mine. Attired in overalls and equipped with a miner's carbide lamp, he entered the cage and descended the 225 foot drop to the bottom. He inspected the coal cars coming in and was impressed by the excellent quality of the coal. He was taken through every step of the mining process. He inspected the mule stables. He handled a pick. He saw a loose roof being repaired. The Governor and H. M. Havner, President of the Pershing Fuel Company, said nice things to each other and both predicted a bright future for coal mining. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 10/3/29)

Life went on as usual for a time . . . The Marion County Fair was held with one day celebrated as Miners' Day . . . Officers made a raid on various places in Pershing and confiscated 120 quarts of beer and 3 gallons of whiskey . . . Pershing was playing good baseball, winning from Harvey, the Knoxville Merchants, and the Veterans Hospital teams. (Young Tom Rowland was the star) . . . A slate fall in the mine made it necessary for a miner to have one eye removed . . . Pershing Fuel Company was awarded the contract to sell 6,400 tons of coal to the Veterans hospital! . . . Pershing was to get a hard surfaced road to connect with Highway No. 5! . . . Perhaps the news that evoked the most comment was the fact that Teresa Vercellino was granted a divorce from Antonio Vercellino, and that she was given the general merchandise store and the skating rink. Also she would receive custody of the six minor children.

But behind the scenes, serious talks were going on. The Pershing mine owners were in desperate financial straits. They were searching for any arrangement that would not entail operating at a loss. Other mine owners were making bids on the Pershing field, wanting to buy it. The Pershing mine owners discussed working with the miners on a cooperative basis, each side thus sharing in the profits and/or losses.

For the miners, pro and con factors to be considered as to whether to effect a joint relationship with the Company were (1) it could possibly jeopardize miners' Union connections, (2) the fact that 100 of them owned their own homes and thus it would be almost impossible for them to move away, and (3) the gambling instinct which told them that the Pershing mine could be operated extensively for 20 more years because of the large amounts of coal still unmined, and it would therefore behoove them "to stick by."

Talks came to an end with the temporary closing of the big Pershing #12 mine in the spring of 1931, throwing 300 miners out of work.



## Soup and Bread Lines Formed

Pershingites were devastated and destitute; they had had little opportunity to save up money after the 1927 strike. Furthermore, they had worked very little since the end of the strike. They feared that the mine might never open again. They were hungry and penniless. Surrounding towns, Oskaloosa, Des Moines, Pella, and Ottumwa came to the rescue. Knoxville sent several truckloads of food.

For the first time in history, a bread and soup line was functioning in Marion County - in the mining camp of Pershing. Almost 400 people were being fed from a central kitchen each day. Long lines formed at the entrance to the basement of the Mining Hall, and they were served a pail of soup one day, beans the next, the amount placed in the pail depending on the number in the family.

A committee of miners went to other towns soliciting food contributions. They reported that Pella had responded admirably. While in Pella, the committee was taken to a restaurant for dinner. One of the men asked for fat beef and nothing else to appease his craving. He ate a big plate of it and later was in bed for two days from the effects. He had been too long without food and suffered the consequences. Another man of the committee tasted meat that day for the first time in two weeks. (*Knox.-Jl-Exp.*, 6/18/31)

Not all of Pershing was fed by charity. Almost half of the town had not applied for aid. They either had worked on farms some of the time or had found other part-time employment.

Suddenly the picture changed, when in early August, 1931, the mine reopened - a splendid ending of the hardest times in the camp's history. Two hundred men went joyfully back to work and the mine expected to employ 150 more men in a couple of months.

Soup lines continued to function for dozens of families who had not yet benefited by being given employment. Many men remained on "The List." Their condition was as bad as ever.

The *Knoxville Journal* ran a dramatic sounding advertisement - in headlines - at the end of August, 1931. It read IOWA CAN STOP THE SOUP LINE BY USING IOWA COAL. LET'S KEEP 50 MILLION DOLLARS IN IOWA THIS YEAR. Accompanying the ad was a picture of the Pershing Soup Kitchen with a long line of people waiting for food.



Organized Government relief came to Pershing in the fall of 1933 to replace the soup kitchen and bread lines. Most of the miners went on relief as soon as they were laid off from the mines. C.Ted Johnson, County relief director, said that as many as 250 families were or had been on relief in Pershing - virtually the whole population. (*Knox. Jl.-Exp.*, 10/14/33)

### **Pershing Fuel Company in Big Trouble**

The miners did not give up fighting against what they considered injustices. A big issue was the miners' demand that they be paid for removal of slate. Often after extensive slate falls, miners had to work many hours to get it out of the mine and without pay. In fact they had to pay for the powder to blast it to manageable size. When the percentage of slate was very high, their incomes were cut drastically. Workers maintained that was in conflict with State law. Operators said that enforcement of the law would force the company into receivership and to close the mine.

The miners did go on strike. And unbelievably and tragically, this biggest mine in Iowa did go into receivership. Valley Savings Bank of Des Moines asked judgment of over \$75,000 against the Company, and asked that a receiver be appointed. Also, the Government filed suit of \$91,000 in back income taxes. Foreclosure proceedings were started.

To avoid panic, E.P. Love, manager of the mine, announced that the court proceedings against Pershing Fuel Company would not affect the operation of the mine. Three hundred men continued to work in the mine. They unanimously agreed to stay with their jobs. (*Knox. Jl.-Exp.*, 11/2/33)

In April, 1934, the mine, which had by then been in receivership for six months, was sold at public auction at the Court House in Knoxville. Valley National Bank and Trust Company of Des Moines was the highest bidder and for \$60,000 became the new owner of the Pershing Fuel Company. The property comprised of 796 acres of surface land, 1,456 acres of coal mineral rights, and the mine equipment. The largest shaft mine in the County had changed hands. (*Knox. Jl.-Exp.*, 4/9/34)

All through the '30s until the final shut down of the big Pershing #12 in 1938, rumors flew concerning the mine - bad news - good news - bad news. The miners and their families felt they were living on a roller coaster. Often the real thing was even worse than the rumors suggested.

Outside political and social forces were operating in Pershing as they



were elsewhere in the Nation. It was the time of the Great Depression, one of the first forewarnings of which was the stock market crash of October, 1929. About a year later, Pershingites were in the soup and bread lines.

Newspapers carried stories of bank closings all over Marion County. Pershing's and Melcher's had been the first. Money was in short supply.

Foreclosures were common. When Franklin D. Roosevelt became President, the first thing he did was to close the banks, so that immediate attention could be given to the stabilization of the economy. He didn't need to close the miners' banks. They were already closed.

### **Violence Erupts in Several Forms**

Unrest was evident throughout the society. Suicides were recorded in the newspapers every week. Robberies were much more frequent. Bootlegging was definitely on the rise. Organized crime (encouraged by the Mafia from Chicago) found followers in the mining camps. Small mine owners were blatantly disregarding coal price codes set by the Government. Disrespect for the law was rampant.

Violence from the outside came to Pershing one morning in early October, 1934. The community was shocked to learn that the Pershing Fuel Company payroll had been robbed by several armed bandits who held up the paymaster and forced office employees to stand against the wall with hands up. They escaped with over \$2,600. Then it was discovered that the telephone wires had been cut. A miner ran to a nearby farm to telephone the sheriff.

If the bandits had come a little earlier in the morning, they could have had much more money. Fortunately for the Company, they had already made the majority of the payments to miners by the time the bandits arrived.

The bandits kidnapped Claude Wright, a black miner, as a hostage and forced him into their blue Buick getaway car, which had Chicago license plates. They raced off at a terrific speed towards Tracy, then headed for Monroe where they abandoned the car. Somewhere along the road, they released Claude Wright. A wad of papers, receipts, cancelled checks, etc. was later found along the road near Pella. At Monroe, the robbers were seen getting into a smaller car thought to be a Chevrolet. No more clues. The bandits had apparently made a clean getaway.



It was concluded that someone who worked in the mine must have tipped off the bandits concerning the time and place where the miners were paid.

However, the bandits were a little smug concerning their clean getaway. Six months later they were back in the territory. They were successful in stopping the car in which John Evans and his nephew, officials of the Smoky Hollow mine at Hiteman (Monroe County), were carrying \$5,800 in payroll money. The bandits held up Evans and took the money.

Fortunately, the sheriff had been tipped off and had blocked the road 50 yards farther ahead by parking four trucks across it. Meanwhile, the sheriff and his posse hid in a cornfield. As the bandits came along the road with their loot, the sheriff and his men came out of the field and riddled the bandit car with a machine gun. The car careened wildly and ran off the road. The four men were captured, along with several weapons, and they were transported to the Albia jail. They were eventually sentenced to 25 years in the penitentiary in Anamosa.

At the trial, the bandits implicated Bruno Marvelli, 24, former Pershing miner who at this time was the part proprietor of the Knoxville Cafe. He had helped plan the Smoky Hollow robbery.

The Pershing robbery was solved at the same time. Bruno Marvelli had tipped off the bandits as to when and where to strike. Marvelli was the Chicago bandits' Iowa connection. It was suspected that he was associated with the Mafia. He was sentenced to 10 years in Anamosa. (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 4/11/35)

Rumors about the Mafia and fears persisted in Pershing and were substantiated in some instances. The "Black Hand," evidently a symbol of the Mafia, was a threat to change ones actions - OR ELSE. In a jury trial a certain man who had killed his brother and his wife and dropped their bodies in a well would never be convicted of murder though his guilt was obvious. During a recess of the jury during which the jurors had left their jackets hanging over the backs of their chairs, they were terrified to find on their return that each had a piece of paper in his pocket imprinted with the "Black Hand." They got the message and voted to acquit the man.

Despair and mental depression accompanied the financial depression. "Miners used to be pretty well off - will miners ever again be able to live the good life?" was the tenor of the people's conversations. Pershing was one of the hardest hit spots in Iowa.



Not all Pershing people were as lucky as George Foote of Pershing was in those dark days. He received a letter saying that he had inherited \$25,000 from his Cousin James in San Antonio, who had once been a slave of a Confederate officer. After the slaves were freed, the cousin elected to stay with his old master, and he was rewarded by being remembered in his master's will. The letter which came had to be read to George Foote, because he could neither read or write. One might wonder whether the reader was "pulling his leg." However, George said that if the money did come, he would spend the rest of his life taking it easy.

### **The Democrats Win by a Landslide**

Franklin D. Roosevelt's ascendancy to the presidency in 1933 provided a glimmer of hope. His attempts to provide training and jobs for those without work were a godsend for the miners who had been laid off.

Pershing young men became involved in two of those New Deal programs, the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) and the WPA (Works Project Administration).

The CCC sprang into existence in 1933, almost immediately after FDR took office. It was not a "leaf raking" program as opponents of Roosevelt jeeringly called it. It was truly a life saver. The CCC was designed for young men 17 to 23 (later 25) years of age. It was a good program in that the men worked on a project of permanent value for Marion County - soil conservation, specifically the prevention of erosion.

Two hundred men lived and worked on a 10-acre camp near Knoxville. The young men were lifted out of the desperation which overwhelms the unemployed. They were expected to look neat and be well-behaved at all times. They received \$30 a month, from which they were to send about three-fourths to their parents. It was a wonderful boon for all concerned.

The CCC enrollees received job instruction and some of them studied for and got the 8th grade diploma. The program improved their employability and restored their self-confidence. After the U.S. entered World War II, the CCC expanded its program and trained men for Armed Services jobs - to be auto mechanics, metal workers, truck drivers, electricians, etc.

The WPA in Marion County was largely engaged in constructing buildings. One of their projects was building outhouses for rural schools and other public institutions. The outhouses were all built from the same pattern - if you've seen one of them, you've seen them all.



The UMWA District #13, headquarters in Albia, was impressed with what Roosevelt had done for the miners. It announced its endorsement for him for his reelection for a third term in recognition of the outstanding advancement of labor legislation under his administration. (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 10/17/40)

Pershing people ordinarily did not get too excited about national politics. When it came to FDR, it was different. They were very supportive in his election campaigns - they knew he was really working for them. It was said that Pershing folk revered God, F.D.R., and John L. Lewis.

Toward the end of the terrible decade of the '30s, it appeared that the economic condition was getting a bit better. Among the contributing factors was a new wage pact for Iowa miners in the UMWA. The miners were to receive a daily wage increase of 50 cents and time and a half overtime for working more than 35 hours. On the other hand, the cost of blasting powder, which the miners had to buy, was increased by 15 cents per keg, bringing it up to \$2.25 for a 25-lb bag. (*Knox. JI-Exp.*, 8/19/37)

If a 50-cent a day increase sounds like a pittance, almost an insult, it must be pointed out that even as late as 1941, a giant box of Post Toasties was selling for 10 cents, a pound of beef for 25 cents, and a dozen oranges for 39 cents in the stores. Spring dresses were advertised at \$3.95.

A 1937 survey made by the *Des Moines Register* concerning conditions in Pershing revealed that life was lived in Pershing without luxuries like plumbing, central heating, and carpets, but most miners had radios, subscribed to or borrowed a newspaper, and drove to and from the mine in some kind of an automobile. They faced the winter with the comforting knowledge that the new wage agreement gave them a substantial wage increase of 50 cents a day. They agreed that they were better off than they were several years ago. (*Knox. JI-Exp.*, 10/4/37)

Several miners were interviewed in 1937 to determine how they felt about mining. According to John Mockenhaupt, "We've all seen hard times here in Pershing. I went into the mines when I was 12 years old because my father was a miner, and our family needed the money. Now, I got a family of my own. I don't know anything but mining coal. It don't pay much, and it's dangerous - but I got to live." (*Knox JI-Exp.*, Ibid)

Cecil Bridges, President of Pershing Miners' Union said, "I like mining, but once in a while I make up my mind to get out of the business. I guess mining gets in my blood because as soon as I get away from it, I can't get



back into a mine fast enough. There is some talk of the Company sinking a new shaft in the future. If this is done, I think Pershing will boom again. (*Knox Jl-Exp.*, Ibid)

### **Pershing #12 Closes - Forever**

Finally, it happened! Pershing #12 hoisted its last ton of coal on March 26, 1938. The big mine which at one time had mined 2,000 or more tons of coal a day and had 750 workers was closed. It had been mined for 19 years which was quite a record. The average working time for a mine in Iowa was but 10 years. The coal was not nearly worked out; some claimed that there was enough coal to be mined there for another 10 or 20 years.

The mine had started in 1919 with much fanfare. Ironically, it closed with a "blast" also. A raging fire broke out in the main entry sometime that Saturday night, which necessitated hurried action on the part of mine officials and workers. William Nichols who lived about half a mile west of the shaft had given the alarm. His wife had awakened about 2:30 in the night by strange noises, and it was found that the fire was almost directly below their house. If the fire had not been discovered when it was, the results would have been disastrous.

The machinery and the mules were still in the mine, 200 feet down and 3,000 feet from the hoisting shaft. Emergency workers entered the mine and worked all day Sunday to dismantle the electric mine motors and get them out of the mine. The 14 mules down there were also hoisted up and out of the mine, having suffered no ill effects.

It had taken the whole day Sunday because many carloads of slate and charred timbers, which blocked the entry, had first to be brought up to the surface in order to clear the passageway. The fire had caused the slate to loosen and fall.

At the point of entry, it was ablaze where there was practically no coal, but the timbers and braces had made it a roaring furnace. It was little short of a miracle that everything was accomplished without serious accident.

The cause of the fire was not known. It might have been set. However, neither the operators nor the miners could think of anyone having had any reason to set it afire.



At least Pershing mine #12 "had not gone gently into that dark night" - quoting the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas who swore he would not depart from life gently.

Lots of memories - both good and tragic - were evoked when the mine closed and burned. It was definitely the end of an era for Pershing miners and their families.

Plans were already in the works for the sinking of a shaft for Pershing #14, successor to #12. But it would never be the same. Technology had changed coal mining.



## Chapter 16

### #14 - THE END OF UNDERGROUND MINING IN PERSHING

Just as Pershing was adjusting to the bad news of the big Pershing #12's closing, good news came via an announcement in the *Knoxville Journal*, January 20, 1938, as follows:

"NEW PERSHING MINE IN PROSPECT. The biggest news of the week is the fact that there will be a new mine at Pershing in the near future that will be as large as the present one if not larger.

Surveying has started in a preliminary way for the new project, with Thomas Rowland, superintendent of the mine, and Henry Hall in charge. The new mine will be electrically powered throughout, and if the present plans are carried out will operate on a large scale of production. Water from the shafts has been eliminated, and it is planned to use one of the older shafts for the new air shaft. Many entries now driven will be connected with the mine when completed.

During the boom times, Pershing was a busy place but in the last few years, it has become run-down owing to a smaller working force employed. The new mine may not bring back the halcyon days of the past years, but it is believed that it will take its place as one of the principal railroad mines of Iowa."

The new mine was part of the vein that was mined in #12. However, it was not as thick or as deep, only about 50 feet down.

The new mine was to be just two miles north and east from old #12. Work began immediately, and the miners were delighted to be in the mines once again. Machinery and rails of the old mine were removed. Men hauled timbers from the old mine. Miners began sinking the shaft. Sheds for the necessary outdoor operations were built. The plan for the new mine was that it would be modern from top to bottom. The plans included the installation of a new waxing machine. Waxed coal is absolutely clean with no dust or dirt. With this treatment the Pershing coal would be more competitive than most coals on the market.



As in the case of old #12, Number 14 was located on the Wabash switch that connects to the railroad at Tracy. It was therefore classified as a shipping mine, which was a distinct advantage over the local mines - at least for a time.

When the mine opened, it hired 120 workers, of whom 95 were diggers; the others were maintenance men. Most of the employees lived in Pershing, but a number of workers drove in from other towns. Ten mules were used to haul the coal to the main entry from where it was taken to the hoisting shaft by electric motors. With its new waxing machine, it was the best equipped mine in the County, (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 1/20/39)

Ed Bucknell had been named the superintendent of the new mine, but after several months, he was succeeded by Tom Rowland, Sr. who had been the mine foreman.

To the joy of miners, the Company, and the truckers, the Iowa Highway Commission built a road from Highway 92 to the new mine in 1941, after much effort and clamoring on their part. It was sort of an insidious blessing, because it made it possible for trucks to come to the mines to transport the coal.

However, trucks use gasoline for their fuel rather than coal; they were no market for coal. The railroad, on the other hand, had been a huge market for coal. The Government had done a great disservice to the coal industry when it established railroad rates unfavorable to Iowa coal shippers and which put the coal industry at a serious disadvantage.

The Government was also setting coal prices, making it a criminal offense to sell coal at lower prices than those specified and punishable by a fine. The Dunreath Coal Company, however, had won a victory against the Government after a long drawn out case. The court decision allowed this company, and therefore all Iowa companies, to sell for lower than code prices, and thus gave them the opportunity to meet the competition of Indiana and Illinois prices. (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 9/11/41)

These and many other outside forces over which the Company had no control were changing and complicating the problems of the miners.

### **World War II, 1941-45**

Life for Pershingites was distinctly altered as a result of U. S. declaration of war against Japan, after Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.



Young men were drafted and trained in various branches of the service and sent off to European and Far Eastern spheres to fight on foreign soil. Youths of various descent - Italians, Welsh, English, central European, and Negroes left the mines for the armed services.

Some would never come back to Pershing. Having seen the world beyond Pershing, various of them chose not to return to mining at all. Maybe they had learned some other trade which they wished to pursue. A number of the army men married in the service and broke the pattern - that Pershing men usually married Pershing women.

Others were going to work in defense plants. A number of them were continuing on in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). Almost any miner who wanted to work had the opportunity to do so. The mine operators asked for and obtained draft deferments for certain men, so some of the miners were "frozen" in their jobs. Older men were going back to digging. Miners were being paid overtime. Pershing mine was running with 100 men. Better times came back to Pershing. An air of prosperity returned.

The market for coal had improved decidedly because of the many troop trains and munitions trains traveling across the country needing fuel for their operations. Since oil and gasoline were rationed, the home heating market for coal was better than it had been.

Yet the mining situation was distinctly a mixed one. The new mine (#14) had not been doing particularly well up to the time of the war. One time when the mine was closed, a number of workers moved out of Pershing to look for work in other mines - a number of them went to Wisconsin. They were tired of the uncertainties as to whether there would or would not be work on any particular day. Demands on the part of miners led to many short strikes. The mine operated only now and then, not continuously.

Maybe it was in response to and weariness with these disagreements that prompted the operators to send out a disquieting notice to a number of tenants saying that they must vacate their homes. The Company wished to move these houses out of Pershing or tear them down. Certain of the tenants ignored the notice until they were ordered by the Court to move. Plans for the future of the mines were not disclosed.

Reports of dead and injured servicemen were coming in and people were missing their boys and feeling anxious and lonely. The old light-hearted,



youthful spirit was missing. In May, 1942, the local Union offered their Miners' Hall as a recreational place for all the community to brighten up their lives a bit. It was open every evening, with volunteers from the community running it. They set up a schedule for the evening hours. Different age groups used it at different hours for playing basketball, volleyball, table tennis, etc.

By 1946, the war was over, and the mine operating with about 100 men. Though coal was on the decline in Iowa and every year the State produced less, Marion County continued to be the leading coal mining county in the state.

Prices were still quite low: a box of Post Toasties was still 10 cents; beef, 26 cents a pound; coffee, 29 cents a pound; Wheaties, 25 cents for two boxes. Money went a long way.

Then bad news. John L. Lewis ordered the closing of several mines, Pershing among them. The strike lasted only a little more than a month. Considerable gains were obtained, an increase of 18 1/2 cents per hour; overtime pay, and two weeks vacation. Ominously, however, the implementation of these terms would increase the cost of coal to the consumer by 50 cents per ton.

Not all the miners had been happy with the strike. A few of them talked about withdrawing from the Union. A group of them met and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of working in strip mining, which was on the increase.

In April, 1947, John L. Lewis called for another strike

Then the blow fell. On May 5, 1947, the 70 some employees of the Pershing mine received this terse notice: "You are hereby notified that due to the abandonment of the Pershing mine, #14, we will have no further use for your services." No explanation. No "ifs and ands." One of the last big mines in the State passed from the scene forever.

Robert Bannister of Des Moines, President of the Corporation and one of its owners, responded to a phone call asking for further information. He said, "The shut down is not due to a failure of the coal supply in the mine. As far as can be judged, there is plenty of that. Under existing labor conditions, it's not advisable to carry on operations." (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 5/8/47)

The immediate cause of the mine corporation's decision to close was



said to be a demand of the Miner's Union that the superintendent Tom Rowland, Sr. be dismissed. The owners, however, regarded Mr. Rowland very highly, and they had no intention of dismissing him. (It will be remembered that Mr. Rowland had risen from the ranks and was ordinarily regarded as "one of the miners.")

The basic cause for the miners' discontent was, however, their fear that the mine was not safe. They felt that attempts were not made to cut down on coal dust, which gave them the black lung disease; that the air was bad, which caused them to be ill and listless and made their arms so heavy they could hardly lift them up; that blasting powder was used in the mines when people were working, which could cause an explosion. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 5/8/47)

The # 14 Pershing mine had lasted less than a decade, whereas the #12 mine had lasted almost two decades. The huge #12 had a much more favorable combination of market, national stability, relations with the Government, and a national technology adapted to coal than #14 had - the timing was wrong for #14.

Each of the two mines had played a significant part in coal mining history and the economy of Marion County. They had been responsible for Marion County's first place among the counties of Iowa in coal production.

It was ironic that almost at the very moment the #14 mine was closing, giant pipelines were being laid by the Natural Gas Company of America which would bring in fuel oil and natural gas, substances which helped to give the coal industry its final blow. The pipeline is about two miles south of Knoxville and was laid past old Andersonville, about two miles south of Pershing. (*Knox. Jl-Exp.*, 7/15/47)

Naturally, the closing of #14 was a difficult time for the miners and their families. An air of uncertainty and fear pervaded the town. Inertia was no longer possible. Perhaps they would not even be able to stay in their houses. Decisions had to be made on their own. There was no longer the Company to take care of them. Some went to mines in other states, especially to Illinois or Indiana.

Perhaps there were other types of jobs they could do - but as the miners said time and again, they knew nothing but coal mining. Every time a family picked up their goods and moved away, the feelings of pain and loss recurred. These were the people they had lived with all their lives. Now the bond of community was breaking down piece by piece.



The Pershing mining camp was unique in that though there was no need for the miners to stay in Pershing after #14 closed, a number of them did. Pershing was not the ephemeral type of settlement that all of the other camps had been. To this day most of the inhabitants are those once associated with coal mining or their husbands or fathers or brothers were. The people will tell you that there is no place they would rather live than Pershing. Rents are cheaper there than in the neighboring towns.

Yet, every town around - Knoxville, Oskaloosa, Pella, Newton and others - have residents who once lived in Pershing. It is Knoxville, however, that has absorbed most of those who moved out of Pershing.

The town (mining camp no longer) of Pershing is of course much smaller in population than it was in the heyday of mining, about 400 people instead of 1,500. Most of those of working age find jobs in Knoxville in the *Knoxville Journal-Express* office, the stores, the Courthouse, or the 3M plant outside of Knoxville. Many work in Pella Rolscreen (now Pella Corporation), or in Vermeer Manufacturing of Pella. Pershing is a bedroom town.

An interesting development related to the large cheap labor pool thrown on the market when coal mines closed was the rise of the Continental Overall Company in Knoxville and Oskaloosa and overall companies in Pella and New Sharon. They all made overalls and other work clothes. Together they hired about 500 workers. No special skills were required. Many women were hired as well. The overall industry proved a godsend to unemployed miners in the immediate years after the closing of #14 (*Oskaloosa Herald* 1/31/58). There were also various small industries that exploited the cheap labor which had been dumped on the market.

Pershing people missed the old community spirit when all worked together in the coal mine. There had been a finality like death about the closing of #14. Pershingites were cut off from friends and relatives, who had moved away.

### **Pershing Reunion, 1958**

Their need to see each other once again found expression in a reunion of unexpected proportions when in 1958, Pershingites decided to organize a reunion to be held the Labor Day weekend. John Provenzano headed the committee to plan the reunion with the help of Charles Sparks, Beverly



Williams, Agnes Erickson, Guy Weldon, and Charles Gott of Davenport as publicity agent (what a monumental task he had). It had been 12 years since Pershing #14 had closed, and many of the former Pershing people had been gone even before that.

Six thousand people came - far more than had lived in Pershing at any one time (highest population was in 1924 with about 1,500), though many insist that Pershing once had about 3,000 people.

They came from ten states - among them Kansas, Iowa, Wisconsin, California, Minnesota, Missouri, and Indiana!

Two kitchens were set up to feed the people, one at the Community Youth Center (the former Catholic Church) and one at Walnut Grove - a pasture across from the Zion Methodist Church where picnics were held. How did they do it?

Mrs. Aaron Roebuck served as the chairman of the program committee. One of the events was the dedication of a Plaque to the 20 men who lost their lives in the Pershing mines. It was to be installed in the Community Youth Center. William Fry of Knoxville, former Pershing miner now a minister, (see portrait of his life, Chapter 17) was in charge of the dedication service. Rev. Frank Clark and Homer Six, both of Pershing, assisted. (*Knox JI-Exp.*, 9/4/58)

### **Watters Park Dedication at 1959 Reunion**

The 1958 Labor Day Reunion was so immensely successful that it was decided to do it again on September 5-7, 1959. It started with a 16-team softball tournament; there was a bathing beauty contest with Joanne MacDonald, "Miss Iowa of 1958" and Harlan Miller, *Des Moines Register* columnist, as judges; an all-day carnival; an amateur and professional talent show; an evening musical show; and a "dawn dance."

Iowa Governor Herschel C. Loveless spoke as did Duke Norbert, Chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party. It had been hoped that their idol, John L. Lewis of the UMWA, would be present but his physical condition prevented that. In a tribute to him, he was hailed as the "greatest labor leader who ever lived."

Meals were served by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Pershing Youth Center all three days of the week-end.



The most significant event of the weekend, however, was the recognition of Joseph H. Watter's generous donation to the town of 3 1/2 acres of land where 18 Company-owned miners' houses had once stood. It was to be used for the development of the Joseph H. Watters Memorial Park. The park benefits the community life of Pershing to this day.

Joseph Watters was a 74-year old retired miner who had worked in the mines since he was 14. He was born in Beacon (Mahaska County), and as a lad he worked as a trapper boy in the mines (one who opens and closes the door for the mule-drawn coal cars to come through).

During his youth Watters had worked in the Northwestern Coal Company (south of Oskaloosa), Everist (near Attica), Tipperary (north of Chariton), One Lock (west of Lovilia,) and White City (near Bussey). He was indeed a typical miner, moving as one mine was worked out to the next one. At age 34, he started work in Pershing #12 on the day of its opening January 6, 1920, and then in Pershing #14 until it closed in 1947. He was proud of his long mining record and the fact that he had been a Union member for 60 years.

Watters "wanted to do something for the children" in this town of 375 population - without a single business except the John Provenzano general store and post office. He echoed the feeling of other Pershing people that the Youth Center was great for community meetings, but that the grounds of that building were too close to highway traffic for safe play by children.

A baseball diamond with lighting facilities was the first part of the park to be finished (for the big 16-team tournament), and long-range plans were made for the construction of a 50- by 80-foot community center for dancing and skating. A landscaping and tree-planting program was being planned.

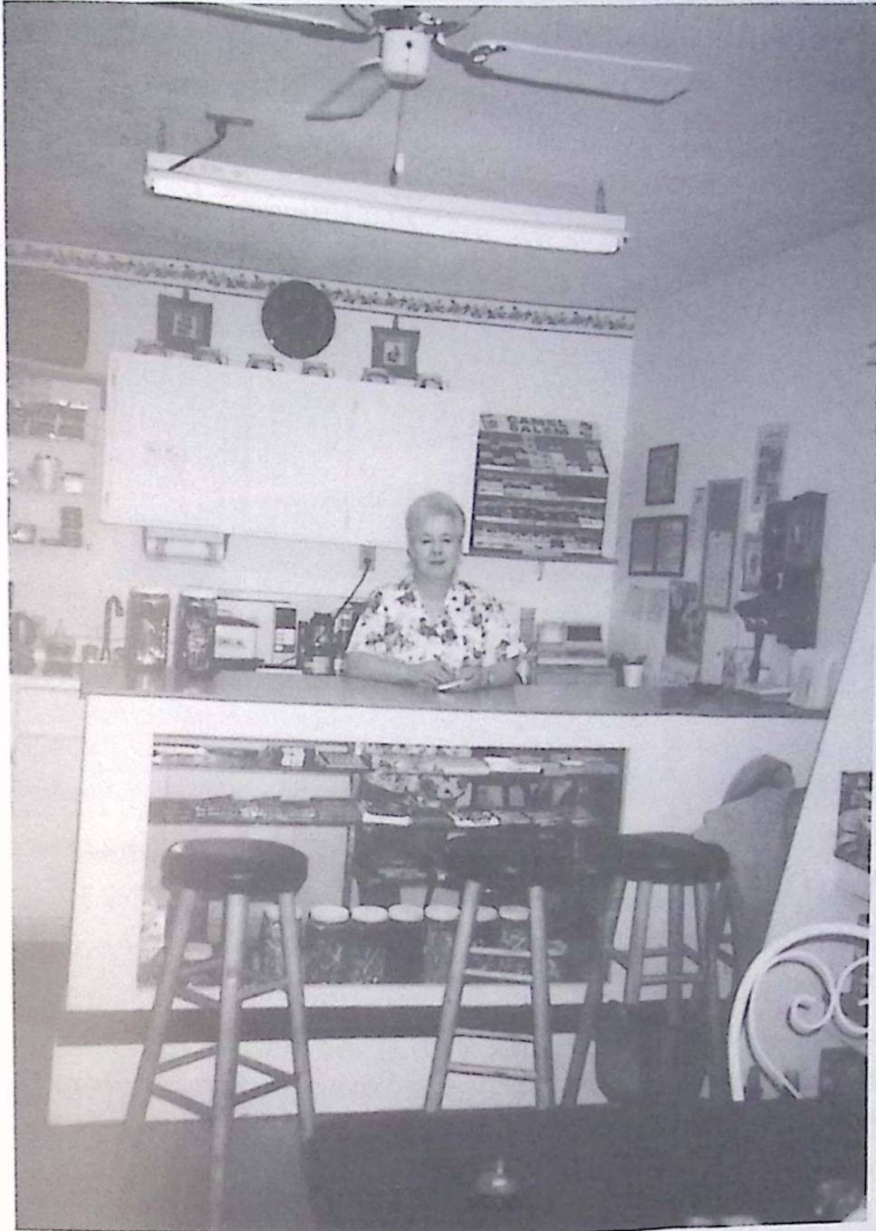
Profits from the reunion were to be channeled into the costs of developing their new park. (*Des Moines Tribune*, 7/8/59)

Today (1995), the park boasts of a community building (smaller than originally planned but important) where dances are held and reunions meet, and Bible School classes are held. It has picnic tables, volley ball net, playground equipment, and hoops for basketball. It is a recreational focal point for the community.

What a warm feeling of strong bonds between old neighbors and friends



as they got together to visit and play and eat together. Doubtless, in their minds also was the wistful feeling that it was good but one can not go back again.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Bonnie Cowman Provenzano ready to wait on customers in her new little store and restaurant, Bonni's Cash and Carry.

Today, in Pershing one sees the abandoned old General store run by the Provenzanos and (before that by the Vercellinos), and Bonni's Cash and Carry, a new little convenience store and restaurant run by Bonnie Cowman Provenzano, where one can buy a hamburger and coffee. Also remaining are a few Company houses left over from the mining days, now



remodeled; some other houses which had been mining houses, too, brought in from old Everist and Andersonville; trailer homes; a few large substantial homes; the corner once the center of the town, where the Company store and the bank once stood, but now in a sad state of ruin; and the high tower for the running water they finally have; and up the Highway G62, the Zion Methodist Church with its cemetery still stands.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Vercellino General Store, owned in later years by John ("Cooney") Provenzano. Building still stands (1995).

It looks as one would expect an unincorporated town would look. Many homes are very attractive and the lawns nicely mowed, but there are places where machinery is piled up, and overall there are few flowers.

One tries to imagine what it was like when it was swarming with miners coming back from the mines, children coming from school and playing on the streets, a busy Company store, pool halls, filling stations, and other stores. Never again would this scene be reenacted.



## Part VI

### PORTTRAITS OF MINERS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

In selecting leading citizens in a community, it is customary, whether consciously or unconsciously, to use yardsticks something like this: families who have lived in the area for several generations, the "old families;" a person's educational background - what college he attended and what degree he earned; or the type of work he is engaged in; or perhaps the degree of elegance of the house in which he lives.

These criteria do not fit so well in a coal-mining community. Nobody had lived there very long, many had not finished elementary school because they went to work in the mines at such a tender age, what work he did wasn't hard to guess - the only jobs were in coal mining. The houses were all the same - usually too small for the family, certainly not elegant, in fact, people were happy if the house was warm in the winter and looked moderately neat.

In the coal mines, all types of work were respected. The whole operation depended on each worker doing his own job well. In one way coal mining was like a factory assembly line - some dug the coal, some hauled in the timbers and placed them where they were needed so that the ceilings wouldn't fall down and kill somebody, some fed and watered the mules, others drove the mules who pulled the coal carts to the shaft, and so on. The tons of the coal mined each day and the pay the workers received depended on each worker, and often their lives depended on each other as well. The chain, as they say, is no stronger than its weakest link.

Good human relations played an important part in the careers of the people profiled. A man who worked in another mine reported that his foreman always carried an axe with him because his men hated him so much. Pershing miners were more fortunate.

A.C. Geery has been profiled in Chapter 6, Harvey. In this section leaders in Everist and Pershing mines - Joseph and William Fry and Tom Rowland and Earl Long are profiled. The Barnett family furnishes glimpses of a dynamic mining family, and also describes their small family mine, Barnett # 3. The Tom Wignall portrait gives insights into the responsibilities and cares a mine owner faces. His mine, Lovilia #3, is described in Chapter 22.



## Chapter 17

### PORTRAITS OF JOSEPH FRY AND SON WILLIAM FRY

This is the story of two resourceful men, Joseph Fry, immigrant boy whose life in the coal mines was a Horatio Alger type of story (poor boy makes good) and his son William. Together their lives span the period of underground coal mining in Marion County.

Joseph Fry was born in 1867 in Liverpool, Pennsylvania, far from the Iowa scene. His parents were of Alsace-Lorraine (French) background. Joseph, was the fourth of eleven children, and it fell to his lot to help his parents keep them all clothed and fed. Joseph had no schooling above the fifth grade. Instead of going to school, he was hired out as a tow boy on a canal boat on the Susquehanna River. He rode the lead mule to pull the canal boats. Often he slept on the back of his mule as they trudged along.

Later he was hired out to a farmer of Pennsylvania Dutch descent for his board, room, and clothing. Along with the farm work, his work consisted of digging out and hauling rocks out of the fields and piling them in fence rows.

From there, he went to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where he obtained work helping to make a grade for the railroad line from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh. He used wheel scrapers pulled by horses and mules to move the dirt. The firm went broke, and Joseph was out of work again. Though the railroad failed, the grade he helped build was used by the highway commission and is a part of the Pennsylvania Pittsburgh and Harrisburg road.

Joseph went off to Iowa with a young friend who had heard that the coal mines in Iowa needed workers. He found work in the Ramsay mines near Oskaloosa, Iowa, and went to live in Evans, their mining camp. Once again, he was working with mules and was hauling coal from the mine. He was earning \$2.78 a day from which he had to pay his room and board, clothing and other personal expenses.

He played a horn in a little mining camp band, and saved enough to buy himself a horse and buggy, a real thrill since he had really never had anything of his own. Now he was able to go courting, and he found a lovely



lady, Mary McCorran, whose miner father had been killed in a mine accident when she was only five years old.

Joseph and Mary were married, and they rented a little three room house. He raised a garden, bought Maggie, a Jersey cow, and raised some pigs.

After he had worked at the Evans mine for twelve years, and the mine was giving out, he learned of the newly developed coal mine at Everist, near Marysville in Marion County, and he decided to apply there. He was hired to work in the Greater Mammoth Vein #11 mine, a slope mine, as a horse driver to pull the coal up the slope and out of the mine.

Moving to Everist was quite an experience. Mary's mother and stepfather and their two grown sons, Henry Hall and Thomas Hall, decided to move with them. Joseph hired a railroad box car to carry the animals and the furniture. The men rode in the box car, and Mary and their three small children went by railroad coach car to Albia. Then they rode a hack (a surrey with three seats pulled by horses) to Hocking. From there, they took a train to Bussey, and from Bussey a hack to the new mining camp of Everist. The whole trip was 25 miles and it lasted a couple of days.

It was their first move as a family and exciting to see the houses being moved in, the Company store being built, as well as a school house. Their five-year-old son William had attended the Evans school for the month of September, but there was no school for him in Everist that first year so his mother taught him how to read a few words.

Their four-room house was set on posts in the midst of a corn field. William remembered how cold it was in winter when the wind whistled under the house and through the cracks in the walls. They put straw under the carpets. His mother put wet rags on the window sills so they would freeze hard and keep out the wind. He was to say years later that it was the coldest house he had ever lived in.

The outhouse was for the use of several families. An open well with a bucket on a rope was to furnish their water needs. It, too, was intended for several families. However, it was not adequate for so many people, and through the years, one of their most exhausting jobs, summer and winter, was to carry pails of water up the hill to their house.

Joseph was ambitious to better his position in the mine, so although he had received practically no schooling, he attempted a correspondence



course for mine foremen from the Scranton, Pennsylvania, School of Mining. It paid off - he passed the examination. However, for some time he continued on with his mule driver job in the mine.

One night he came home from work elated, as he shared his good news with wife Mary, "Mother, I had a real easy job today. I was sent over to #5 to observe how the mine foreman directs the running of the mine. They are going to put me in charge of the drivers at #11. I will be the boss driver. I will select the drivers, give them certain mules to drive, and tell them what entries and rooms will be their responsibility." From this point, all depended on his effectiveness on the job.

When he received this promotion, the family was assigned to a much better house than they had ever lived in before. It had more space, was better built, and very importantly, it was wired for electricity. The family enjoyed electric lights!



(Edna Fry Moses)

Joseph Fry "modern" home in Everist - after he becomes a boss. Other miners' homes in background.

There were even better things to come. The Greater Mammoth Vein Company reorganized, and the Pershing Fuel Company came into existence. Plans were made to develop a new mine to the north, and in 1918, work was started to sink the main shaft (which took nine months to complete) for what came to be called Pershing #12.



The Pershing Fuel Company had built fine homes for their administrators, who would be the first employees on the scene. In November, 1919, Joseph Fry and his wife and little daughter Edna set off by horse and buggy for their new home. Their expectations were high. Though it was only four miles between Everist and Pershing, the journey seemed long, and it was difficult because of a very steep hill. What a beautiful sight finally at the end of the journey to see their new stucco home, the finest they had ever had!

Joseph continued in the Pershing mines until 1938, when the Company announced that they had decided to close #12 and open a new mine (#14). Joseph decided that would be a good time to retire. He was 71.



(Edna Fry Moses)

Joseph and Mary Fry, 40th wedding anniversary.

He was ever known for his fine rapport with the men, his good decisions in bringing about efficiency in the mines, his honesty, and his fairness. More than one worker said that Joseph was the best foreman they had ever worked for.

He had been a caring family man too. Mary had the best household conveniences available - she was one of the first to have a kerosene stove. He had provided his family with musical instruments and good books, took them on little trips when possible, and had welcomed their young friends into their home for evening singfests. He was a remarkable father.



His six children all had some brush with coal mining; the five daughters were married to coal miners, and son William worked in the Company store at both Everist and Pershing, and at times in the mines in Pershing as well. William preferred farming to mining. However, later he became a Christian minister. He kept a long journal which provided much of the information on his father Joseph Fry and on the Everist mining camp.

The daughters married as follows: Mary married Dale Harrington; Blanche married Art Ryerson, who later became a business man in Pershing; Ethel married Harold Bridges, Myrtle married A. J. Moses; Edna, the youngest, married Jonas Gott, who died in a slate fall in the mines, after which she married Ernest Moses, also a coal miner.

Joseph purchased 20 acres of land outside of town and one of the Pershing houses which he moved to his acreage, and here he and Mary lived out their remaining days. Joseph died of a heart attack in 1949 and Mary died in 1956.

Joseph Fry had witnessed and participated in the total life of the Mammoth Mines in Everist and in the life of Pershing #12. Thus, he had seen coal mining from its earliest stages to the beginning of its decline. He had helped to mold the history of coal mining in Marion County.

## WILLIAM FRY

William Fry was born in 1899 to Joseph and Mary McMorran Fry in the mining camp of Evans, located several miles west from Oskaloosa. When he was five years old the family moved to the new mining camp of Everist.

He had a delightfully happy childhood attending school (though there was no school the first year), swimming in the creek, playing ice hockey in winter (they called it "shinny"), playing baseball, picking wild blackberries, fishing, thus enriching the family diet, and playing with sisters Mary (three years older) and little sisters Blanche, Myrtle, Ethel, and Edna.

Everist was unique for a mining camp in that it offered two years of high school, whereas other camps offered no high school. It offered night classes for men who worked in the mines. William felt that the high school teachers, however, were not well trained. He mentions the Latin teacher who had had only one year of college and who studied it at night so he could teach it the next day - not too satisfactorily.



William's parents discussed with him preparation for a profession. His father did not want him to work in the mines. His older sister Mary had taken some summer courses in primary teaching methods at Des Moines College and had been hired to teach primary grades in Everist. After finishing 10th grade, William decided to follow the same path as Mary had. He took courses at Des Moines College to prepare himself for taking the teachers' examinations. He passed the tests and was given a job teaching manual training and agriculture in the Everist school. He does not state in his journal the reason for leaving teaching after that first year.

In 1917 after school was out, he got a job at the Everist Company Store - shelving the stock, keeping the store clean, waiting on customers, and delivering groceries to customers who lived some distance from the store, even to Marysville, 2-1/2 miles south.

At that time a number of men were preparing for the opening of a new mine several miles away and were "batching it" in a field as they made the initial preparations for the mine. They needed supplies of groceries and William delivered them.

He also opened the store for two hours on Sunday mornings so customers could buy fresh meat, butchered on Saturday and kept cool in the large ice box in the Company store. There was still time afterwards to go home, get dressed and make it to Sunday School which started at 10 a.m. (There was no church in Everist. Sunday School met in the schoolhouse.)

On Thanksgiving Day, 1919, William was sent with a Model T truck to start moving the contents from the declining Everist store to a newly built Company store in Pershing. Mr. Sandiwell, the owner of the store, built shelves and counters as William made trips back to Everist for the remaining merchandise, and then shelved them. At night he waited on customers who came in to buy pop and ice cream.

William continued to deliver groceries in Pershing as he had in Everist. He also made daily trips to the railroad station at Tracy and at Knoxville to pick up freight for the store. The roads often were so bad that he got stuck in the mud when he went up little hills. He had to carry items such as one-hundred pound sacks of sugar up to the top of the hill, sack by sack before he could get going again - not easy in the gumbo-like mud.

For all this, he received \$25 a week.



Though he had taken a course in teaching at Des Moines College, William had not finished high school. While working at the store, he studied at home and took examinations at the Attica High School which enabled him to graduate.

Though his father, who was a mine boss first in Everist and later in Pershing, had urged William not to go into mining, he knew of no other way of making a living, so in 1922 took a job as a timberman in the big Pershing #12 mine. However, he was so attracted by farm animals and farm machinery that he decided to go into farming in partnership with another man. He continued farming for a number of years.

A farmer-miner combination was a good one, especially in the years of waning coal mining, because the mines often shut down in the summer, but were working in the winter when work was slack on the farm. From 1938 - 1947, the years of Pershing #14, he was filling many different types of jobs in the mine. He had a bad start, however, because in 1938, just as he was beginning in the mine, he was hit by a chunk of slate as he was digging an entry (a street in a mine). He heard it rumbling and ran and almost got away but not quite. He was badly cut and bruised and spent several weeks convalescing in the hospital and at home.

In 1941, he writes "The mine started up again in September and we worked steadily about two months, then in November and December we got only two or three days a week. Then on Christmas Eve we were ordered to take out our tools as they were shutting down the mine. You can imagine how the miners felt as they had their families to keep during the winter. I was more fortunate as I had some resources in the produce from the farm, but my four sisters had to apply for relief."

(Fry, p.61)

Tom Rowland, Superintendent of the Mine and old friend from the Everist mines, called upon William time after time asking him to fill in for someone who did not appear for his work, or some task that required some real ingenuity. William built breakthroughs for better circulation of air in the mine, he served as a timberman, as a surveyor to find the source of a water leak in the mine, and as a nightwatchman. This included almost everything - overlooking the engine room and the office, delivering powder to where it was needed, checking that the doors which controlled the air currents were closed, watering the mules, repairing tracks, and keeping the fires going in the office. Agnes Ericson, the bookkeeper, said William was the best fireman she had ever had.



One day he got a really big surprise when Tom Rowland, the superintendent, said "Bill, I want you to go to Des Moines to the Mine Inspectors Office and take the exams for mine foreman. Stop at my office tonight, and I will give you a couple of books to study. You will have two weeks off to get ready."

He passed, of course, and was given a job of Boss Driver. He was to see that there was a driver for every mule, assess the number of mine timbers needed, check the powder list, and regulate the cars in each section. When a driver was missing, he filled in himself. He amazed the other drivers with his skill with the mules - they could hardly believe he had never done it before.

These are only a few instances to show how versatile and resourceful he could be. He had a feeling for how the mine should be operated. He was a mine superintendent's dream.

Suddenly in 1947, the owners of the mine decided to shut down Pershing #14 permanently. It was the end of William's mining career. He was representative of those who had worked in the mines during the uncertain transitional years when work in the mines was increasingly scarce, and without warning, it was over forever.

William proved to be a multiple-career type of man. He was a feed salesman for a number of years, he was an insurance salesman, and later worked in an office.

Most surprising of all was his decision to go into the Christian ministry. He had assisted as a lay person in church services through the years. Now he felt urged to go into fulltime ministry. He took some courses in theology, and attended summer sessions at Garrett Theological Seminary.

He served in a number of small parishes in Iowa and Missouri for some years until 1972 when he retired at the age of 73 years. He and his wife Sylvia had been much loved for their faithful compassionate service through the years. They retired at Wesley Gardens in Des Moines.

William Fry was one of many who alternately through the years had farmed and worked in the mines. During its waning years and then in later life, he had to find other ways of making a living.



## Chapter 18

# TWO BELOVED PERSHING MINE ADMINISTRATORS

Pershing mines were not wracked with labor troubles. The reason was that they had capable administrators, who therefore were respected; men who were also understanding and compassionate and therefore loved by their miners.

### Tom Rowland

No history of coal mining in Marion County would be complete without recognition of the part played by Tom Rowland, first as foreman and later as superintendent of the Pershing mines. He was respected by the entire Iowa mining industry as well as by the Miners Union, and most importantly, by his own mine workers and his family.

Tom was born in What Cheer, Iowa, August 18, 1884. At age 13 he started work in the mines there, then went to Durfee, a camp east of Bussey, worked for a short time at Buxton, then to Everist where he became a foreman, and finally to Pershing where he spent the last 30 years of his working life.

Somewhere along the way, Tom took a correspondence course from a mining school in Pennsylvania where he learned how to be a foreman and also how to be a surveyor. This training along with his innate ability had prepared him for many types of work down in the mines as well as for administrative responsibilities.

In 1918, Tom was sent by the Mammoth Coal Company (later called the Pershing Coal Company) from Everist to fledgling Pershing as a foreman to help get Mine #12 operating. He was given first choice of one of the stucco houses the Company had built for its administrators.

Eventually, Tom was given the highest position in the mine - in 1941 he was made superintendent of the Pershing mines.

Tom recognized ability in other men and made wise appointments for administrative positions in the mines. He knew who would be able to tackle the difficult jobs.



He had good rapport with his men. Even as superintendent, he spent much of his time underground. They knew that he could and would do any job in the mine. He expected much of himself and his men, and they did their best for him. They knew that the safety and well-being of his miners was one of Tom's top priorities.

One aspect of his job was that of hiring - and firing. The latter was one of the most ticklish of his problems. Pershing was a Union mine, and the Union was very powerful. When someone was fired, the other miners went on a temporary strike, and they held a closed meeting in Miners' Hall (no administrators allowed) to discuss the case and to judge whether justice had been done in firing the miner. In many instances, a compromise was reached, and the protest did not have to go to the higher court of the Union. In any case, it was always a trying time.

Tom Rowland was appointed as a member of the Board of Directors of the Pershing Savings Bank which opened in 1922. He was honored by Iowa Governor Beardsley with an appointment to the State Mine Inspectors Board, a position he held until his death.

He was a quiet man, thoughtful, courteous, and kind. He was modest about his achievements. Probably he didn't realize what a great man he was.

Tom Rowland was indeed a family man. He raised his nine children to be responsible citizens. His children were his pride, and he took excellent care of them. He enjoyed family outings, celebrations of birthdays and other important days in the family life.

Tom was the law in his house; he was firm in his discipline of his children, but he was very kind and fair. His children loved and respected him.

A little story told by one of Tom's daughters was about an incident when Tom learned that two of his sons had thrown mud at little Edna Fry on the way home from Attica in the school wagon. Tom told his sons just before supper that for doing that they were to receive a "licking" right after the meal. Immediately after supper, he directed them to a back room, took out his razor strop and gave them each a couple of swats. However, the boys did not cry which likely meant that he hadn't struck them very hard. (The mental anguish during supper had likely been worse.) Nonetheless, the boys got the idea their father was trying to convey.

Tom was an avid reader and he continued to take correspondence



courses; he was a self-educated man, very aware of what was going on in the world.

In 1947, when he was 63, he decided to retire. He had spent 30 years in the Pershing mines. He had helped guide the course of big Pershing Mine #12 from its opening in 1919 until it closed in 1938, and then that of Mine #14 from its beginning to its end in 1947 - thus through all the days of underground mining in Pershing. What a remarkable record! He really was Mr. Pershing Mines.



(Leona Rowland Allen)

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Rowland,  
50th wedding anniversary.

In his ten years of retirement on a farm near Pershing, he enjoyed gardening and raised many beautiful flowers. He especially loved big red peonies. He died on December 31, 1957, and his family still decorate his grave in Graceland Cemetery in Knoxville with red peonies when they can.

Three of the four Rowland daughters became school teachers in rural schools; one of them, Leona Rowland Allen, also taught in the Pershing School. The Rowland's son Garald "Pete" was awarded the Schilder Blanket (the highest athletic honor) at Central College, and was a coach in the Knoxville High School. Son Tom was a coach in southwest Iowa.



## Earl Long

Earl Long was a man much loved by the miners, in fact by all who had contact with him.

(Leona Rowland Allen)

Earl Long



He was early on the scene in the Pershing mines. He came before the opening of #12 to help get it organized. He and Joseph Fry (see profile, Chapter 17) were the pit bosses in Pershing #12.

Earl was born, one of 12 children, in the Coalfield mining camp in Monroe County, and as a child moved with his family to the Everist mining camp. He started working in the Greater Mammoth Vein Mining Company mine at Everist at the age of 11 years as a trapper boy, the work often assigned to young children. The trapper boy opened the curtains, which kept the dust out of the mine, when a mule-drawn coal car came through on its way to the shaft. It is obvious that he had little opportunity to go to school.



However, he did hold a position of respect in the mine. The pit boss oversees the condition of the entry ways, making sure they are safe for the mule drivers as well as assigning diggers to rooms in the mine, a general supervisory job.

Very soon, he was promoted to a position as foreman, a position he held the rest of his working life.

He and his family lived in one of the "big houses" reserved for administrators. He was a good family man with three sons and a daughter. Everyone who knew him speaks of his famous whistle - when he whistled it could be heard a long distance, and wherever his boys were at the time, they knew it meant come home at once, and they came running.

Later the family moved to Attica. Here he was a member of the school board for many years.

He did not live a very long life. At age 50 he had a stroke and died about a month later, January 11, 1937. He had worked in Pershing #12 for 18 years.

He had been so popular with his miners that his funeral was reported as being the biggest one ever held in Zion Methodist Church. Mourners filled the church and then the basement and others stood in the lobby and on the stairs, and even though it was January, many of them stood outside. His obituary read, "He was noted for his ever present smile, his kindness, and his industrious nature."

Son Glenn graduated from Central College, then taught in Pershing for one year, after which he taught in Attica. He became the principal, then the superintendent at Attica, which position he served until his early death in 1945. Daughter, Erma Long Darnell, lives in Knoxville.



## Chapter 19

# THE JACK AND SARAH MOLINE BARNETT FAMILY

(And Their Mine, Barnett #3)

### **Portrait of Three Generations of a Coal Mining Family Rich in Spirit, in Family Togetherness, and in Achievements**

Jack Barnett's earliest ancestor in this country came as a soldier in the British Army. His descendants, the John Stanford Barnetts, were large plantation owners in Virginia. He was run out of Virginia because of his abolitionist views, fled to Ohio where he and his family lived for 17 years, traveled by way of the Ohio, Mississippi, and finally the Des Moines Rivers to settle at Sand Ridge, about 2-1/2 miles north of Eddyville, Iowa. The year was 1853. Their son John Eden Barnett was five years old.

Jack (christened John Myrl) Barnett was born in 1882 to John Eden and Lovica Barnett in a log cabin in Sand Ridge north of Eddyville. Instead of a lawn around this log cabin, there was sand and more sand. Yet, it would be hard to find a more beautiful area, so heavily wooded and in sight of the Des Moines River. Legend has it that this was Chief Mahaska's favorite village and that his grave is not far from the Barnett home. How fondly Jack's children were later to remember their childhood visits to Grandpa John Eden and Grandma Lovica's place in Sand Ridge. For the young Barnetts, it was like going on a pilgrimage to a sacred shrine.

### **The First of Many Mine Jobs**

Around 1900 when Jack was 17, and the Des Moines River bottom flooded again and destroyed their planted crops, he decided to go to work as a miner in the Greater Mammoth Vein Coal Company's mines at Everist in Marion County. This decision to leave farming was a momentous one, the beginning of a whole life in coal mining and was to determine the careers of all of his sons as well.

After a couple of years, through the influence of his brother Frank, he got a job as a "digger" in the White Breast Fuel Company's Pekey (pronounced PK), mine, two miles north of Eddyville, in Mahaska County.



Pekey was a large mining camp of between 200 and 300 houses, spread over the landscape. Jack and Frank and the parental Barnetts lived over the hills about a mile west of the center of Pekey. The camp also boasted a two-story boarding house, which the Company had provided as living quarters for the single men. A Swedish woman, Anna Haag Moline, ran the boarding house, and her husband Peter Moline, was a carpenter and blacksmith for the mine.

Pekey was to change Jack Barnett's life forever. The Molines had a young daughter Sarah whom Jack was bound to meet because she played the piano for the dances. A mile or two distance between the two was not too great a distance to prevent Jack from courting this young lady.

Jack worked at Pekey until about 1903, when he and brother Frank started work at White City, mine #5, owned by the Crescent Coal Company. Several love letters Jack sent to Sarah back there in Pekey were discovered in recent years. The reader, of course, has guessed the rest of the story. They were married in 1905, when he was 23 years old and she was 22. They were to become the parents of a large family of Barnetts. Their first four children John, Kendall and Byron, twins, and Howard (Babe) were born at White City.

After about seven years, in 1910 or 1911, the Jack Barnett family left White City when Jack began a job as a mule driver for Hoover Fuel Company mine #1 in Monroe County. Sons Myrl and Tom were born in Hoover #1 camp. Three years later Jack moved to Hoover Fuel Company's #2 mine. Young Myrl started school at Hoover #2.

In 1919, Jack who had evidently found favor with Charlie Hoover (inventor of the Hoover Vacuum Cleaner), started to work at Hoover's new mine, the McCagg mine which was near Flagler. Thus began the Barnett roots in Marion County. The Barnett family became established here as permanent residents. The last of the Barnett's 10 children Robert (Bob) and Elizabeth (Betts), twins; and Douglas (Gov); and Jerry were born at McCagg.

Moving the 25 miles from Hoover to McCagg was quite an ordeal for Mother Sarah. She and six sons (ranging in age from John, 14 to Tommy, 4) walked along the Rock Island tracks to Lovilia, from there rode the Burlington Railroad to Flagler, and from Flagler walked along the Rock Island spur to McCagg. But, alas, when they arrived at McCagg, their house was not ready, and so all seven walked to Andersonville where Aunt Margaret Rustan lived. They stayed with her for a while until their



house in McCagg was available. Meanwhile Jack moved their furniture by wagon. It took four days by wagon to move the 25 miles from Hoover to McCagg because of the terribly muddy roads.

Jack became a boss driver at McCagg - he was in charge of directing the mule drivers to the rooms where there was coal ready to be hauled out, as well as having full care of the mules. Two sons began working in the mines - John, 14, fired the boilers, and Kendall, 12, was a trapper boy - he opened the swinging doors to let the mule drivers with their coal cars pass through.

Where their children would be accepted in a school was a real problem for the Barnetts. They were shunted from one mining camp school to another, as each was experiencing problems of overcrowding. At first they were sent to Victory school near Pershing, then two different schools near Flagler - South Flagler and North Flagler, each more than a 2-1/2 mile walk. Finally, they were assigned to Liberty School at old Andersonville, a happy solution to the problem. By cutting across the fields, it was only a little more than a mile to walk. And the school provided stiles over the fences to make it possible for even the smallest of the children to get over and through. They loved this school.

When McCagg shut down their mine in 1924, Father Jack and young sons Myrl, Kendall and John went to dig coal in Pershing Coal Company's Mine #14, where he worked for ten years. Next, Jack and young son Bob dug coal for the nearby Ramsey-Doomes Coal Company for a few years.

### **Barnett #3, Their Own Mine**

In 1938, Kendall and Doug started the Barnett Mine #3 on the Barnett's own land. Fortunately, Jack Barnett had been able to buy 78 timbered acres of the McCagg coal mining land, and he purchased several acres of the abandoned Rock Island right-of-way land as well.

Sons Kendall and Doug discovered that there was still a lot of good coal in this newly purchased land. They started the Barnett # 3 mine, a slope mine they operated for several years. Barnett #3 was truly a family affair. Without too much outside help the Barnetts dug the entry way and built the tipple themselves from rails from the abandoned Rock Island track and other materials which had been discarded. It was their own mine!

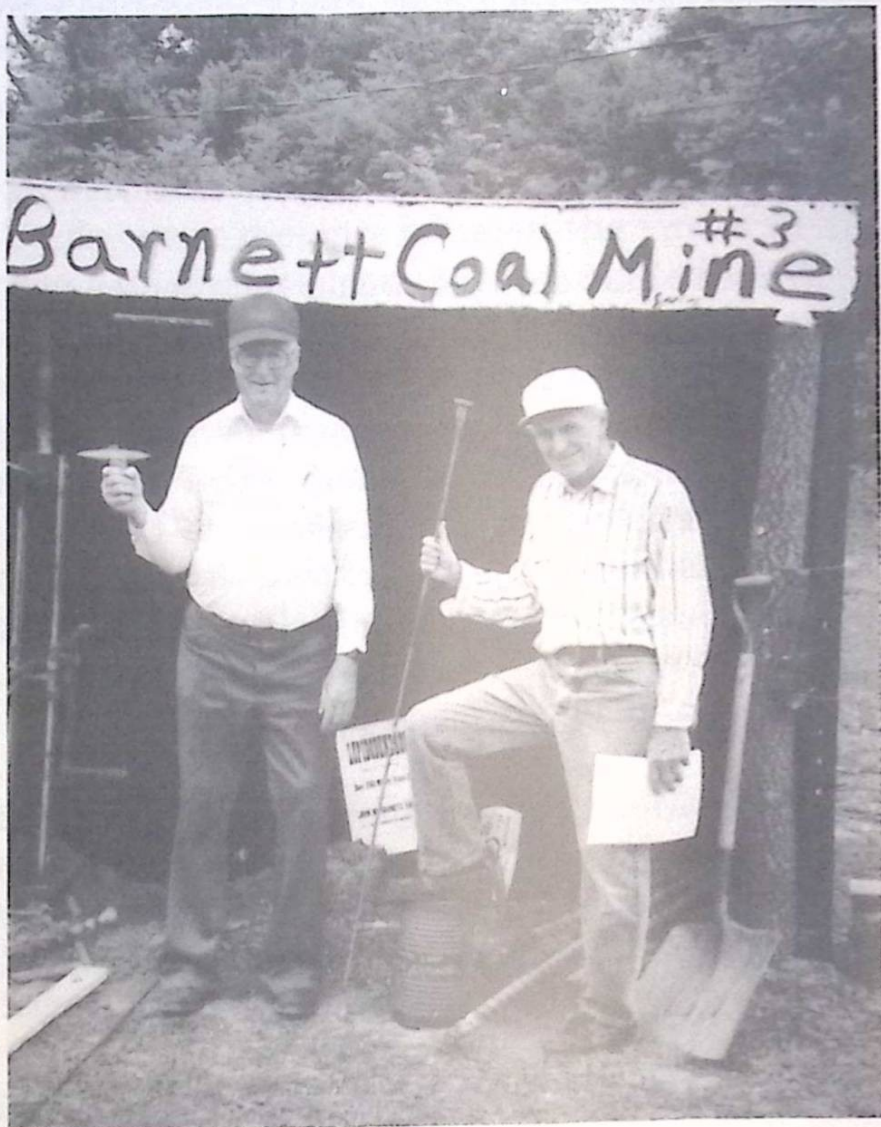
Jack and his remaining eight sons and Scott Wilson, Elizabeth's



husband, operated this mine until the outbreak of World War II. When four of his sons and his son-in-law went to war, those who were left at home continued working this mine until the end of the War. This area in Marion County would be the home they would remember. They had settled down!

(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Replica of mine entrance of Barnett #3 constructed for Barnett Family reunion, July 4, 1995. Brothers Myrl and Jerry Barnett wield mining tools.



### Glimpses of Family Events and Relationships

Jack worked in the mines for 45 years before retiring. It had been a hard life. He had left his children a goodly heritage; he had taught them to be resourceful and hard-working. His children speak of his generosity and how he shared their small family resources with those in need, for instance, with a poor widow and her children. He was a good example.

Others who knew him speak of what an ardent and vocal Republican he was, unusual for a miner, and of his strong interest in baseball, sometimes serving as an umpire in the games. He was doubtless responsible in part



for his sons' athletic interests. People remember him smoking his large cigar with a glass of beer in his hand.

To women living in today's world, Mother Sarah's life would be considered a hard one. She washed all the family clothing on her washboard. Think of all the diapers she must have washed for ten children. Think of all the shirts and trousers saturated with coal dust she must have washed for the 10 men in her family. And there was the cooking, canning, cleaning, mending and caring for sick children.

John and Sarah had to scrape to support their large family. Yet, Sarah managed to save \$1.50 each week so that her children could go to the movies (10 cents each) on Saturday and have an extra 5 cents to spend on candy from the vending machines. Her children never forgot this.

Sarah's life was hard also in terms of sorrows she had to bear. As a small girl at Forbush mining camp (Appanoose County), she witnessed the death of her sister Ruth who crawled under a train to pick up coal for family use. When the train started to move, the child could not get away in time. And in 1936 Sarah lost son Tommy.

On December 9, 1936, young 21-year old Tommy Barnett was killed instantly in the Lost City mine in Mahaska County when a slate fall crushed his chest. He had been transferred the day before from the room he was familiar with and which "off the record" his Dad checked every Sunday. A friend of the boss had asked for and gotten Tom's room.

Tom was apprehensive the next day as he told his mother about it at breakfast. However, he went to the mine and was whistling and singing as he worked. He had asked Jim Goff, the mule driver, for a considerable number of timbers to better prop up the roof as he did not trust it. Before they came, the roof suddenly crashed and fell upon him. Tom's voice was stilled forever. His brother Bob, who was working at the top loading coal, heard the crash and rushed down. When someone asked him if he knew the identity of the dead man who was still lying beneath the layer of slate, Bob said, "Yes, he's my brother."

Jack received the sad message at the Pershing mine where he was working. He left immediately in his Model A to tell Douglas, Myrl, Betts, and Jerry (it happened to be Jerry's 10th birthday), pupils at Liberty school in Andersonville. When they came to the door, he gave them the stark news. "You must come home. Tommy's dead."



Working together for the good of the family was part of the Barnett philosophy. The sons of the family worked in many different types of jobs in addition to mining. They always turned their earnings over to the family bank account. In fact, it was told of Myrl that he turned the last check he received as a single man over to his parents. Then, when he got married, he had to borrow money to do so.

The Barnetts worked together and played together. In their back yard, they had constructed a long narrow court for playing *bocce*, a lawn bowling game they had learned about from the Italian miners at Pershing. It was a real old world touch.

Work in the mines was often slack in the summertime and when there was no work, the family had a wonderful time going to Bellefontaine (near Tracy) on the Des Moines River, where they rented a shanty for \$10 a year. They swam and fished and played in the water. Sometimes they got a bit tired of eating catfish. Friends came and brought fried chicken, and each group could relish eating the others' meat.

Four of the Barnett siblings enjoyed playing musical instruments and singing together. Perhaps they inherited these interests from their musical mother. Doug played the mandolin, Bob the harmonica, Jerry the rattlebones, and Betts (Elizabeth) the guitar. Sometimes they were accompanied by brother Bob on the banjo. They called themselves "The Yodelers of the Sunset Trail," and sang for Flagler reunions and other events. One Fourth of July they performed for the Moravia celebration and then the Bussey celebration. It was a long grueling day, but they received the handsome sum of \$20 at each place. They followed the traditional custom of putting the money into the family account.

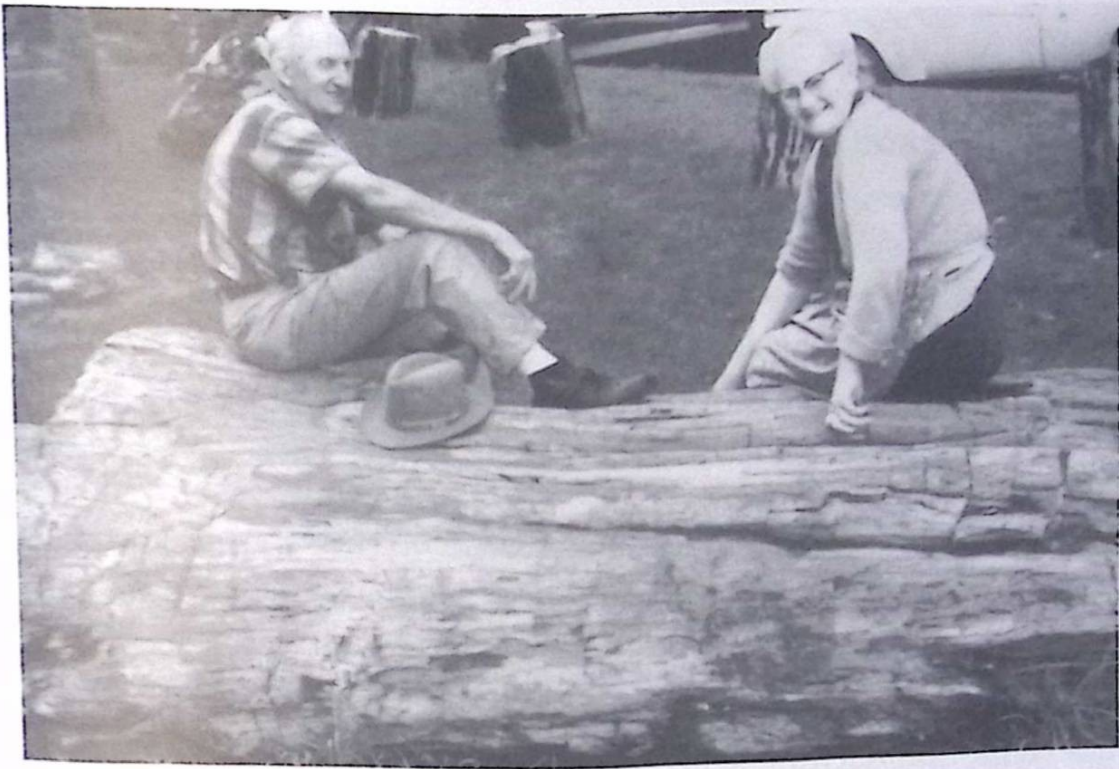
As was true in most of the mining camps, baseball was almost a passion with the young men in their family. Jack's eldest son, John Barnett was a legend as a pitcher. "Big John," they called him. Woodrow W. Geery says of him in his book *Tales by a River Rat*, 1994, as he reminisces in a chapter titled "Baseball, Fried Chicken & Big John" about the wonderful Marion County teams and players:

"I dedicate this tribute to the memory of a former teammate who was the epitome of a semipro player. A fierce competitor of great talent, his sportsmanship far exceeded acceptable standards. He was a source of inspiration both off and on the field and was a man of high moral and religious integrity. If there is a semipro team in heaven, Big John Barnett will be on the mound."



## Discovery of Fossilized Tree Trunks on Barnett Farm

The family obtained a new interest and a claim to fame when in 1954 they discovered huge lengths of beautiful lepidodendron trunks buried deep in their back yard. They are the petrified wood of the giant (80 feet tall) tropical trees that grew in the area 250 million years ago. The climate at that time was much warmer, and it was wet and swampy. Ordinarily, the trees died and fell into the tropical swamps, and they became coal. Instead of forming coal, these trees had fossilized and become petrified wood. When cut and polished, the lepidodendron slices present beautiful surfaces.



(Barnett family)

Jack and Sarah Moline Barnett seated on lepidodendron trunk.

Scientists proclaimed the great significance of this find. When the news was made public, rock hounds from many states rushed to the area. In 1961, at a three-day exposition at the Barnett farm, people from all over the nation came and camped at the farm and across the road. Jack Barnett did not wish to sell the specimens but was glad to trade for other specimens which people had to offer. In fact, he traded 2-1/2 tons of lepidodendrons. He exhibited them at the State Fair and contributed many specimens to science departments of colleges and universities.



## Children Growing Up and Leaving Home

Coal mining had provided a livelihood for the family during their growing up days, but it had taken its toll as well. Tommy was killed in the mines; John and Kendall both were troubled through the years by black lung disease, a disease which constantly saps a person's energy.

As Jack and Sarah Barnett's children were growing up, the days of the big underground mines were coming to an end. The younger Barnetts, especially, had to find other types of employment. World War II interrupted the lives of four of them. Following is an account of what happened to the various family members, some of whom are no longer living.

Son John A. Barnett resented some of the practices in the local mines, "hogging the land," by bordering companies, for example. He moved to Hiawatha, Utah, and became involved in coal mining operations.

Byron Barnett became a food supervisor at the Veterans' Hospital in Knoxville.

Kendall Barnett, twin brother of Byron, went to the mines in Utah to join John.

Howard Barnett ("Babe") was an official at the Concrete Materials Company at Marion, Iowa.

Myrl, who had come to be a foreman in the mines, enlisted in the Armed Services, where one of his assignments was to serve as a barber. When he returned home, he became a licensed barber in Des Moines.

Robert Barnett, after returning from action in the Marines, enrolled in college, and in time became the Vice-President of Operations of Golden Sun Feeds, Des Moines.

Douglas ("Gov") became a buyer for Convair Aircraft Division, San Diego, California. He bought the electronic devices for the F-16 planes.

Jerry Barnett became a medical doctor. He worked hard to finance himself through Central College and Drake and the University of Iowa Medical School. He interned at Broadlawns Hospital. He became a pharmacist and was also an anesthesiologist in Mercy Hospital in Des Moines.

The only Barnett daughter, Roberta Elizabeth ("Betts") Barnett married



Scott Wilson, and they lived on a farm across the road from her parents. Scott worked with the Barnetts in the mines. Tragically, Betts died at age 66. She and her husband Scott died within ten days of each other, both of cancer.

Elizabeth's four sons are an important part of the Iowa scene. Son Douglas Wilson is a distributor for Pella's Vermeer Manufacturing Company's agricultural machinery in northern California. He has done extensive research and writing on the history of the Barnett family.

Bob Wilson is an art teacher in the Twin Cedar High School near Bussey. He is the cover artist for this book.

Dennis Wilson is an English teacher and coach at Montezuma (Poweshiek County).

Randy Wilson is a coach at the Knoxville High School. Randy is a great runner and has distinguished himself in many athletic events. In 1980, he qualified to run the 880-meter race in the Olympics. He was ready to go to Moscow for the event, only to find that the U. S. had boycotted it to protest the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. Thus perished Randy's life-long dream.

Jack Barnett died in 1966 at age 84; Sarah Moline Barnett died in 1969 at age 86. They had lived long and blessed lives.

The Barnett farm has been divided among the descendants. Randy Wilson lives on a part of the old farm, and he and his brother Bob Wilson have made it a beautiful garden spot. Rows upon rows of gorgeous, exotic flowers produce a riot of color. One of the brothers' aims is to produce flowers that will attract Monarch butterflies. The brothers are experimenting with many varieties of wild prairie flowers and keeping scientific records of their various properties.

Big slag heaps peek out from among the thick growth of trees and add another interesting dimension to the total scene. Randy and his family have remodeled and live in one of the old McCagg mining camp houses. They have made the farm a real showplace.

Across the road from Randy Wilson's place is another wildly beautiful part of the Barnett land. Joyce Barnett, daughter of Byron, married Gordon Hayes, whose father, Kenneth B. Hayes, was the co-owner of the Lovilia #3 and other mines. Gordon and Joyce Hayes have proved that



abandoned coal mining lands, which are usually horribly ugly, can be made lovely.

But it takes an incredible amount of imagination and hard work. The coal slag heaps are now heavily wooded; the old, stagnant, smelly, sulphurous water entrapment pond has become an inviting fresh lake fed by springs.

Boats lie on the lake, and it is stocked with fish. Steps down to the lake lead to clear waters for swimming. It would be hard to surpass the beauty of this sylvan lake, with its wonderful recreational opportunities.

The original Jack Barnett house stands across the road from where the Randy Wilsons live. It is plain, not beautiful, but it seems to represent the strength and character of the Jack Barnett coal mining family. Betty Jo Barnett Hancock, Byron's daughter, lives there at the present time.

From the above record, it is obvious that the Barnetts are resourceful, capable people. They are witty and fun-loving, and there is real rapport among them. They prize their coal mining heritage and celebrate it. It's especially refreshing to see the pride the younger generations have in the family coal mining tradition.

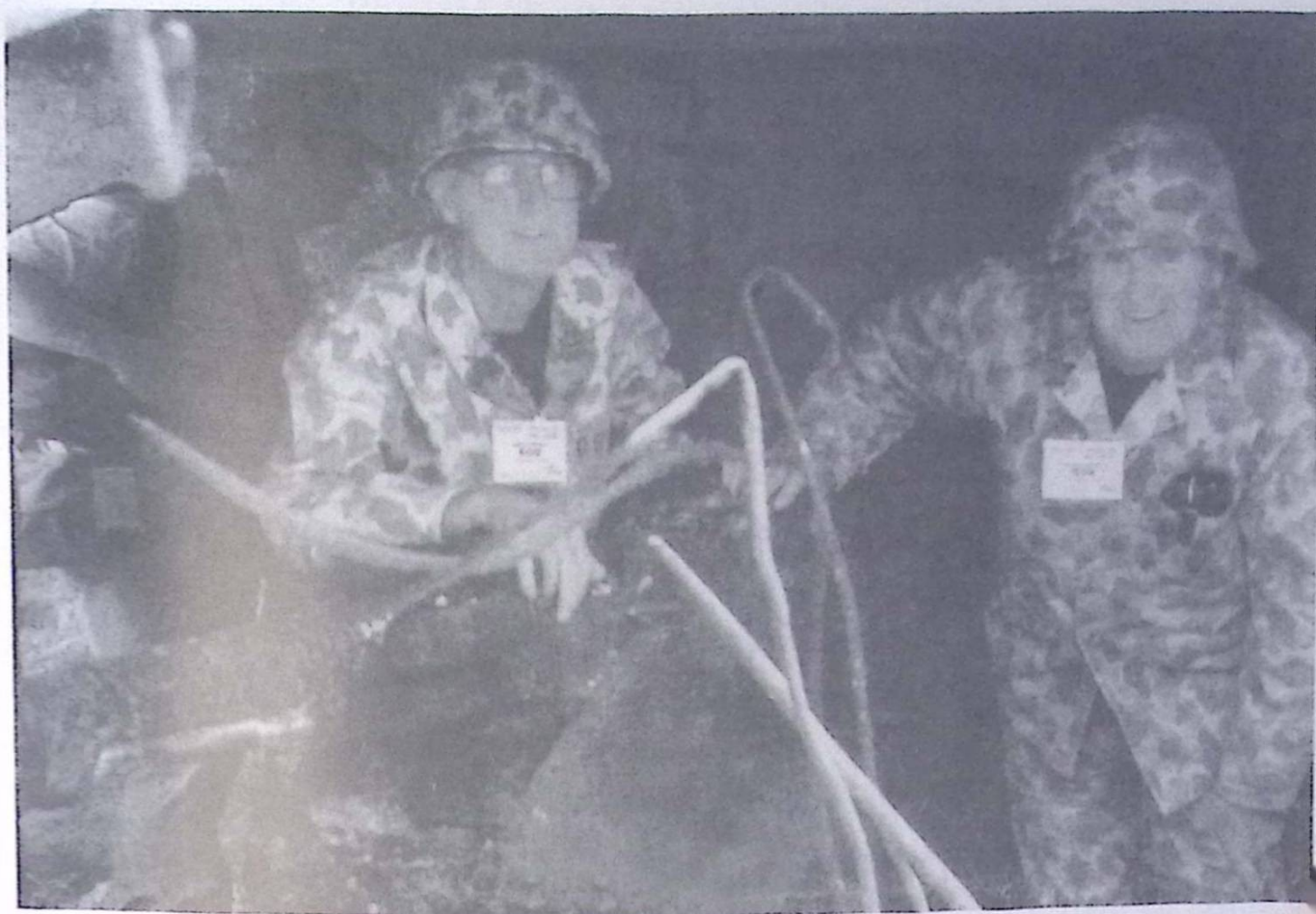
The Barnett family has periodic reunions at the old Barnett Farm. During the Fourth of July week, 1995, 150 Barnett descendants from all parts of the country met at the Randy Wilson place to renew family ties and remind themselves of their heritage. They updated their genealogy, held a memorial for those who had died, and praised God for family blessings. With Doug Wilson as leader they toured the many sites of former coal mining camps where the family had lived (a sentimental journey), played *bocce* as the family used to do, held a family talent night, golfed, attended the car racing events at Knoxville, reminisced, of course, and got in a lot of good visiting. (At Thanksgiving, they have reunions in Carbon County, Utah, where so many of their families now live.)

A special feature of the 1995 Reunion was a celebration of the part that four of the Barnetts had played in World War II. Bob and Doug distinguished themselves with the Marines in Iwo Jima, Myrl in the Navy Seabees in Hawaii; and Jerry in the Army Paratroop division in Germany.

A video of Bob and Doug's return to Iwo Jima for the 50th celebration of the end of the War in 1955 was shown. They wore their dungarees and were among the veterans who helped raised the Iwo Jima flag once again.



## MARINES RETURN TO IWO JIMA



SADAYUKI MIKAMI/Associated Press

Marine 3rd Division veterans Douglas Barnett, San Diego, right, and his brother Robert, of Ankeny, Iowa, inspect a Japanese bunker on Tuesday during the 50th anniversary ceremony of the battle of Iwo Jima.

Their pictures were in newspapers in San Diego and San Francisco, and they were honored on a *Victory at Sea* presentation on CBS-TV, as well as at various events in Iowa.

At the same time, Carolyn Barnett Creger of Casper, Wyoming, daughter of Howard "Babe" Barnett, presented her book *World War II Experiences of the Barnett Brothers* to the group. It is a tale of courage and bravery in extreme danger.

Carolyn writes in the introduction to her book, "Was there ever a better family than the Barnetts? It is a caring loving family. I was fortunate to grow up in this family and to feel this total unconditional love. Uncles, I love you so much!"



## Chapter 20

### **TOM WIGNALL:**

#### **A Man of Ingenuity and Integrity**

Written by Joyce B. Huizer

While rummaging through boxes and file drawers in Tom's den, countless newspaper clippings, pictures, and mining books surfaced. The windows of the den frame a peaceful view of Red Rock Lake. Tom and his wife, Mae, built this lovely home in the Coalport area for their retirement years.

Photo albums tell of Tom Wignall, born in Buxton, Iowa, on January 12, 1912, "the coldest day recorded in Iowa history," Tom often mused. There are pictures of his parents, James and Kate Gorden Wignall, who moved to Des Moines when Tom was a child. Later the family moved to Attica.

Tom was always a leader and organizer. He was a star football player. He was president of his senior graduating class in Attica in 1929 and was awarded a scholarship to attend Central College in Pella. However, Tom wanted to own a car and chose to go to work with his father in the coal mining business for a year. That decision set the direction for his 48-year career in coal mining.

On June 15, 1940, Tom married Mae Marie Roberts from Lamoni. Numerous pictures in family albums show Tom and Mae with children, Tommy (Tom, Jr.) Linda (Lin) Sue, Jacquelyn (Jackie) Jo, and Margaret (Muggs) Ann. All four children married, and eleven grandchildren refer fondly to their grandparents as Papo and Nana. Theirs is a close knit family that shares pleasures and tragedies.

Tom retired in 1979, and soon thereafter had a series of health problems. He had open heart surgery in 1982. Tom submitted to back surgery in July, 1983, in an attempt to repair damages from years in the mines. Six weeks later shunt surgery was required to relieve pressure in his brain. Tom didn't recover fully from this series of surgeries, and in 1993 he was hospitalized with Alzheimer's. It seems an injustice that this man who cared so much for others should have to endure the indignities inflicted by this horrible disease.

A number of certificates in an album give information about various safety courses that Tom had taken and awards honoring him for safety measures in the mines he owned and operated.



His wife, Mae, told me that Tom always held the safety of his men as his top priority. She told about a time that there had been a "fall" in one of his mines and about \$20,000 worth of equipment had been buried. "That doesn't sound like a lot of money," she explained, "but in those days it was a huge sum." Mae went on say that the men on Tom's crew insisted that they go into the mine to salvage the equipment. They were determined to recover the machinery, but Tom said, "No, machinery can be replaced. The lives of men cannot." Tom cared more about the welfare of his men than about his own possessions.

Tom Wignall had first-hand experience in the dangers of underground shafts. Newspaper clippings, now yellow with age, tell of a terrible mine accident. While Tom was operating Lovilia Coal Company, he had joined Don O'Brien (Monroe County) and others in a "legal fight about the use of black powder." In 1953, an explosion in O'Brien's slope mine took the lives of Harold Barnes, 36 and Ben Nichols, 45.

Tom explained to *Tribune* staff writer, James Cooney, "We heard about the disaster and went over to help out." Two men (Tom Little, a Pershing man, and Gerald Lane) partners with Tom Wignall at Lovilia Coal Co. and two men (James Love and A. B. Overturf) from O'Brien's firm joined Wignall in going down into the O'Brien mine to "see what really caused the blast that killed Barnes and Nichols."

The five men rode "a little locomotive . . . back into the shaft. . . where the working base was located." They split off into teams to examine entries and underground rooms. In an area identified as "No. 5 room," they "found the place where Barnes and Nichols apparently had been killed." They conjectured the cause of the explosion was a malfunctioning blast that resulted in a dust explosion.

After visiting about it for a few minutes, Wignall and Overturf started back up toward the main shaft. In a short time Overturf noted that the air "didn't seem any too good," and they realized that the other three men were not following them. In a moment of panic, Tom rushed back to tell his three friends to hurry out. About 30 feet beyond the No. 5 room, Tom found his co-worker, Tom Little. Wignall later told *Tribune* staff writer Cooney, "He was on his hands and knees gasping for breath and trying to crawl. Apparently he, Love, and Lane, instead of coming back toward the main shaft, had decided to look along the entry a little farther and had run into gas. The entry beyond Room 5 had a little dip downward, and that's where the gas apparently had accumulated."



Wignall said, "I dropped down alongside Little and grabbed him. I got hold of him and tried to pull him out along the entry. Then I felt myself going down. . . . My knees buckled and I had to let go of Little . . . I remember thinking, 'I can't get Little out, I can't do anything for him.'"

Years later when Tom retold the tragedy, he said a vision of his wife Mae and his four children flashed before him at that moment, and he knew he had to leave the scene. Tom told of uttering a prayer and promising the Lord that if He would get him out of the mine and let him finish raising his family, he would never forget Him. Tom managed to crawl back to the main shaft, and Overturf got him onto the locomotive and out of the mine.

Tom recalled looking back as they left the mine. He said, "the last thing I remember was seeing a dim light down in the entry. It must have been one of their (Love, Little, or Lane's ) lights." Tom was given oxygen and survived. Love, Little, and Lane perished in the ordeal. The cause of their deaths was listed as "white damp" (lack of oxygen).

Long before this troubling incident, Tom had always put the safety of his men above everything else. He was awarded numerous certificates for first-aid training. He arranged for his employees to take first-aid courses. He was a Certified Hoisting Engineer and a Certified Mine Foreman. Tom worked closely with state and federal safety inspectors.

In 1957, Tom was appointed by Iowa Governor Loveless to serve on the Iowa Board of Mine Examiners. He served in this capacity for many years and was visited at his mines by Governor Ray.

In 1968 Tom Wignall received the Joseph A. Holmes Safety Association award for 934,740 hours as a mine owner/operator without a fatality or disabling accident in his mines. At his retirement January 1, 1979, he continued to hold this safety record.

Son Tommy worked with his father in the Lovilia Coal Company. He put his safety training to use, and on December 17, 1965, he was credited with saving the life of Mrs. Steven Donnelly, Jr. of Knoxville. He received a Special Act Award from the Corps of Engineers for "using artificial respiration to save a life."

Mrs. Donnelly had been pinned in her car under five feet of water after she lost control and plunged into a pond of water at the Red Rock Dam construction site. Tommy's quick action saved her life. He had completed a first-aid course conducted by the U. S. Bureau of Mines at the Knoxville





(Tom Wignall)

Governor Robert Ray visits Tom Wignall's mine. The Governor donned a carbide lamp for the occasion.

fire station just eight months before Mrs. Donnelly's accident. (*Knox. Jr.-Exp.* 12/21/65).

Tom Wignall was a board member of the National Independent Coal Operators' Association. He took an active role in this organization and at a national convention in Louisville, Kentucky, he was given a life-sized bust of himself carved from coal. The sculpture was presented by Executive Secretary Louis Hunter. The inscription reads:

Presented to  
TOM WIGNALL  
for the outstanding operator of 1970  
Presented by  
National Independent Coal Leaders

Tom worked for years as an owner/operator of underground mines, as a partner in earlier years and independently after he gained experience. He was a skilled architect and mechanic. At one time he employed over 70 men and did all the bookwork in addition to managing the operation. It was once suggested, "You could become a millionaire if you'd pocket some of the cash." Tom's response was, "When I look at the person in the



mirror when I shave, I want to be able to respect the man I see.” He was a person who “worked with his men” and never had the attitude of being above them. He was as comfortable working shovel to shovel with the men in the mines as he was in white shirt and tie at the conference table with dignitaries.

Tom Wignall was a prominent community person. During the 18 years the family lived in Bussey, Tom served in various leadership roles at the First United Methodist Church, City Council, Masons, Oddfellows, Lions Club, and the Bussey Board of Education.

When the family moved to Knoxville in 1958, Tom became active in the Methodist Church there. He was on the Board of Directors of the Knoxville Community Hospital and was very involved in the planning and building of the new Knoxville Hospital facility. He gave freely of his energies and his resources.

Tom Wignall stands tall in the chapters of coal mining history - in his county, his state, and the nation. He has made a difference in the lives of others.



## Part VII

### MODERN TIMES AND PROBLEMS

New methods had to be used if the coal mining industry in Iowa was to be viable. The costly item of labor had to be eliminated as much as possible. The mechanical mine replaced labor-oriented shaft mining. But not for long. Strip mining replaced the mechanical mine. With these continuing innovations, the industry carried on successfully for a time. However, miners, some of our best citizens, left the State. Change, that inevitable facet of life, made adjustment painful for many people.

Lowering labor costs helped the industry temporarily, but another insidious problem arose. Market for the coal was declining. Iowa coal had too high a sulphur content which meant that dangerous fumes were expelled into the air. Household consumers found the fumes, ashes, and soot unacceptable. They chose to buy the more expensive Illinois and Appalachian coal. It was cleaner.

Fortunately, the industry still had the electric power plants as customers. They purchased the coal in tremendous quantities. The mining companies had to rely heavily on these local customers because they could not profitably ship the coal out of the state.

The competition between Iowa coal and Appalachian and Illinois coal came to an end before very long, however, as is disclosed at the end of Chapter 21. A new invader was stalking the markets.

Environmentalists viewed the coal mining scene and its effect on the land. In the 1970s, they became active in demanding that measures be taken to reclaim land where coal had been mined. Efforts to reclaim the land, as well as ongoing problems related to old coal mining areas, will be part of the Iowa scene for some time to come.



## Chapter 21

# REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN COAL MINING

The closing of Pershing #14 raised danger signals as to the future of coal mining in Marion County. Obviously, the costs of mining were too high for a company to be able to make a profit. Some new way had to be found to produce coal cheaply or get out of the business. Labor was the single highest item of expenses. Every task in the mines was based on labor. Fortunately, two very different types of solutions were found.

### 1. The Mechanized Mine - Lovilia #3

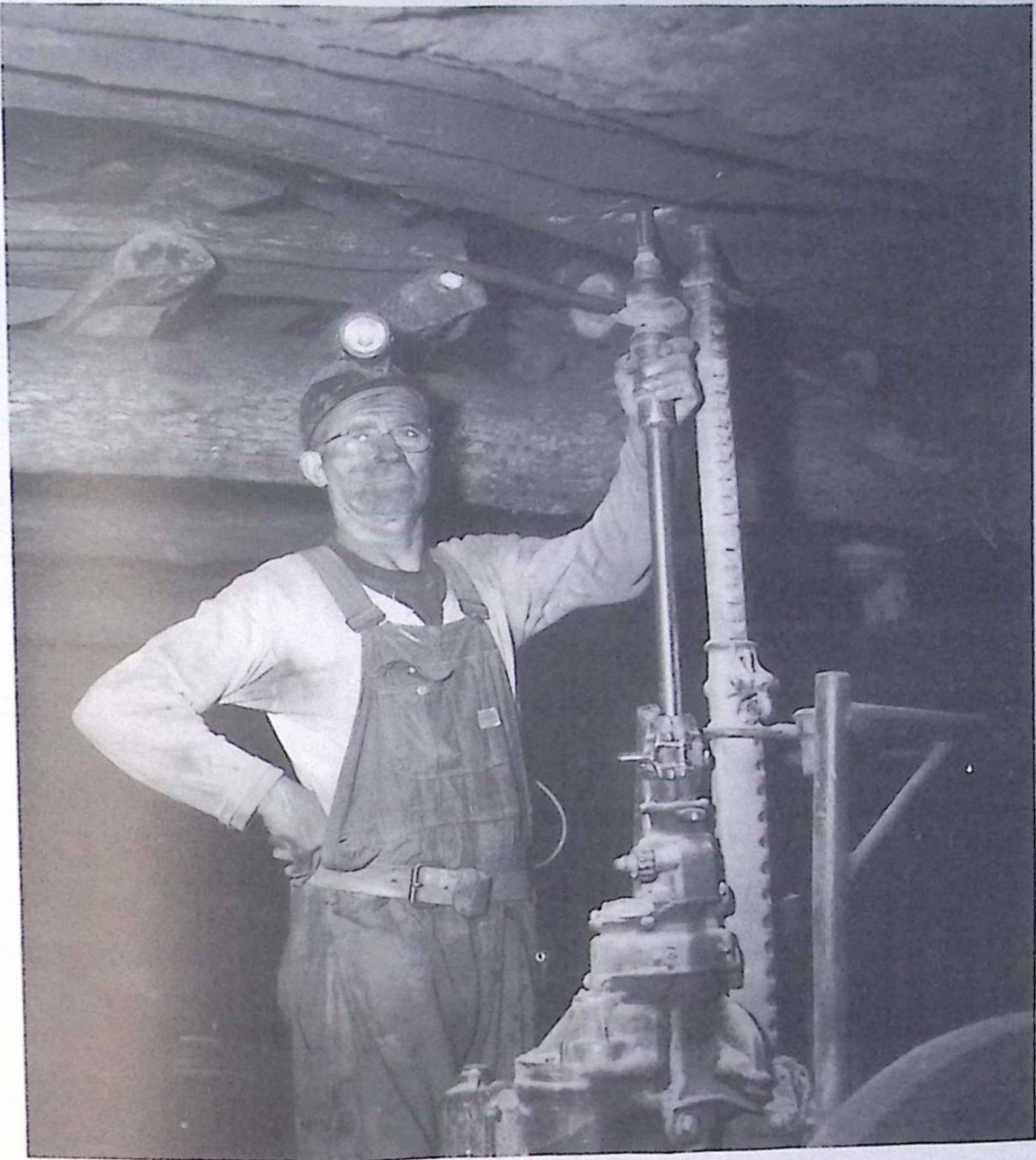
It seemed little short of a miracle when in 1951 partners Tom Wignall and Kenneth B. Hayes sunk a shaft about a mile from Pershing and began mining coal, almost without the use of human labor and totally without mule labor. These two men had operated several mines near Lovilia in Monroe County before coming to Marion County. They called this remarkable mine that produced coal with so few miners Lovilia #3. The miners called it a "mechanical mine."

A wonderful feature was that roof bolting now took the place of timbers to prop up the ceilings (no timbermen needed except in the entries and at the shaft). It was, in fact, the first mine in Iowa to be approved for roof bolting. Besides being labor saving, it secured the roof in a better way and was much safer than before, when so many men lost their lives in slate falls.

Lovilia #3 was Iowa's largest shaft mine at that time; two-thirds of the coal mined in shaft mines was coming from this one mine. It was also the State's most completely mechanized mine. One third as many men could now produce the same amount of coal. Two hundred tons came out of this mine every day almost "untouched by human hands." Instead of being diggers, the workers were machine operators. What a welcome change from the stooping, lifting work miners had to do for so many years.

Owner Tom Wignall, one of the best known and most respected men in the Iowa Coal Industry, was the superintendent of the mine. When asked how the mining was done, he explained each step in the process:





(Des Moines Register)

Miner in Lovilia #3 uses bolts instead of timbers to prop up the ceiling.

“One machine slices under the six-foot vein of coal (no diggers needed).

Another machine drills holes for explosive charges that blasts the coal loose (no shot firers needed).

A mechanical loader then picks up the coal from the floor at the rate of 40 tons an hour (this had been the digger's job). The loader dumps five tons of coal into a rubber-tired shuttle car (no rails needed) that rumbles through the low passageways to the mine railroad in the main entryway.



The shuttle car automatically transfers its load to the pit cars on the tracks. An engine pulls the train of loaded pit cars to the bottom of the mine shaft, where it dumps its load into an elevator bucket.



(Des Moines Register)

Electric cars are used instead of mules in Lovilia #3.

The bucket rides up the 126-foot vertical elevator shaft and to the top of the tippie.

At the top of the tippie, the bucket is automatically emptied, and the coal slides through chutes over vibrating screens which sorts the coal according to size.

The coal falls into hoppers. Trucks drive under the hoppers, a gate is opened, the coal drops down, and it is ready for the trip to the market - the electric power companies." (*Des Moines Register*, 10/14/56)

All good things come to an end. Lovilia #3 was closed down in June, 1963, after 13 years of production. It had averaged 60,000 tons of coal a year. At the time it was closed, it was the most productive shaft mine in Iowa. But now, Wignall and Hayes said that the vein of coal had been exhausted.



The rooms in the mine were allowed to cave in, and the shaft was filled. Most of the equipment was moved to the Company's new shaft mine, Lovilia #4 in Monroe County.

(Tom Wignall, Jr., in partnership with Billie Williams, owned and operated Lovilia #4. It was a \$7 million business until Iowa Power and Light reneged on its contract to buy Wignall's coal - afraid of ever stricter Government regulations concerning sulphur content. There was no way the mine could continue, though the owners felt there was enough coal for 25 more years of mining. It closed in 1981 - Iowa's last underground mine.) (*Des Moines Register*, 10/11/81)

### **Strip Mining - A Different Type of Operation**

Though strip mining had not been heard of in 1910, and the first mention of it in State Mine Inspectors' Reports was in 1932, by 1950 it had become the most common method of mining coal in Marion County.

The preparations necessary to open an underground mine were costly and time-consuming, taking months and even years. A good share of the expenses stemmed from the costs digging down many, many feet vertically to make the shaft and then horizontally to dig the entries and cross entries (all by hand), so as to make the area accessible for mining.

Strip mining was the answer to the problem of reducing heavy labor costs. With the introduction of giant draglines and huge shovels, mine operators could gain easy access to coal deposits by mechanically removing the overburden (the soil, sand, and stones above the coal).

Another advantage of strip mining was that it was safer - safer from dust, gases, and bad air, all detrimental to the miners' health, and from explosions and slate falls which were impossible in a strip mine.

Though the incidence of fatal accidents was much lower after strip mining began, tragic things still did happen. In 1935, for example, Robert Holdsworth, age 28, who worked in the Wilson strip mine east of Knoxville met death in a strange type of accident. A dynamite blast hurled a piece of slate 190 feet into the air, hitting Holdsworth and fracturing his skull. He died instantly. (*Knox. JI-Exp.* 10/3/35)

In addition to being safer, advantages of strip mining over underground mining were that (1) timbers were no longer needed, thus effecting a huge



saving, (2) ventilation was unnecessary, (3) it was easier to load the coal, and (4) the mobility of the equipment.

Miners who had once worked in underground mines never did like to work in the strip mines. The even temperatures were so much more comfortable in the underground mines. On the other hand, in the strip mines, the heat in the summer and the bitter cold in the winter made for disagreeable working conditions. Although water could and did collect in the deep mines and miners often had to wear boots, the outdoor mines often were much wetter and muddier, they said.

Usually strip mining was a matter of reworking abandoned underground mines. The entries and tipples of the old shaft mines were torn down, and strip mining followed. A great deal of coal had been left behind in the old room and pillar system so as to prevent cave-ins. It was estimated that when a mine was abandoned, more than 1/3 of the coal had to be left in place in order to hold up the ceilings.

One of the pioneer companies in strip mining was the Knoxville Penn Coal Company with strip mines northeast of Flagler. Because of their great success in the Flagler venture, this company opened two strip mines in 1932 in the vicinity of Old McCagg mine (also near Flagler). They used the old Andersonville railroad tracks to ship their coal (*Knox. Jl.-Exp.*, 10/13/32)

On October 3, 1935, the *Knoxville Journal* pictured the interior of the Dixon Coal Company strip mine four miles east of Knoxville, saying that it was Marion County's biggest strip mine with 500 tons a day coming out of that particular mine.

Another early big strip mine was the Dunreath Coal Company mine near Flagler which had an annual production of 200,000 tons and claimed to be the largest strip mine in Iowa in 1947. In 1949, this mine had the distinction of being the first strip mine ever to beat out every shaft mine in Marion County in terms of production. The Company operated several pits near Knoxville and Flagler. (*Knox. Jl.-Exp.*, 1/6/49)

### **Vander Zyls - A Pella Coal Mining Family**

Coal had been mined in the Pella area from as early as 1890, from a number of slope and shaft mines. They were mostly family affairs. The Renier Dieleman family and Godfey Bevan, a Welsh mining engineer,



operated mines along what is now Highway 163. The Buwalda Brothers mine was a large producer as well. These and smaller mines in the area closed in the early 1920s, as coal operations became unionized and mostly controlled and owned by larger corporations. (Loren Vander Zyl, 1990)

In the 1930s, The Diamond Block Company, a large operation headed by brothers Simon and Paul Vander Zyl and Frank Denicola opened two pits a mile or two south of Pella. They hired 35 to 40 miners, most of whom came from the immediate area. Although Union men came to induce the miners to join the Union, they were never able to convince the Vander Zyl miners to do so. And there were no strikes. As in all mines, there were a certain number of summer layoffs, the time when there was less market for coal.

The coal was sold directly to the consumer in Pella and nearby towns and even as far away as Minnesota. Vander Zyls became dealers in coal as well as producers. Vander Zyl's Coal Yard in Pella sold the coal from their own Diamond Block mine as well as handling the sale of coal from nearby mines - the Rigger Mines from Harvey, the Newton Coal Company at Otley, Monroe Block, and also some coal from Pershing and Flagler. Local teamsters hauled the coal to its various destinations. It was a good-sized business with about 15 employees.



(Herb Vander Zyl)

The giant dragline at Vander Zyl strip mines.





(Herb Vander Zyl)

Workers at the Vander Zyl strip mine.



(Herb Vander Zyl)

Loosening the coal at the Vander Zyl strip mine.

When in 1945 Simon and Paul Vander Zyl felt that all the coal that was economical to mine was worked out, they shut down the Diamond Block mine.

The Vander Zyl coal mining tradition continued, however. Simon Vander Zyl's son Herb opened the Newton Coal Company at Otley and Herb and Logan, Paul Vander Zyl's son, opened the Monroe Block Coal Company at Monroe as well as operating smaller mines. Their mines were among the last in the county to be in operation.



## Sinclair (Wilkinson) Strip Mines Between Pershing and Tracy

The largest strip mine ever to operate in Marion County was near Pershing, though it had a different name. As might be expected many people referred to it as the Pershing strip mine. Even after two decades of coal mining by underground methods in the Pershing area, it could be said that "thar was still coal in them thar hills." Although mine operators maintain that certain mines were completely "worked out," state geologists in the late 1940s and 1950s estimated that there were more than 30 million tons of coal in Iowa and that less than 2% had been mined. (*Knox. Jl.-Exp.*, 1/6/49)

In May, 1949, the exciting news was noised about that the Sinclair Coal Company of Oklahoma with branch headquarters in Des Moines had purchased the Pershing Fuel Company land and that they planned to strip it.

Sinclair had acquired a total of 12 square miles of land - a hefty amount - so as to carry out their plans. The land included the old Pershing #14, which had been discontinued two years earlier, as well as the Big Six and Greater Mammoth Vein shaft mines. Sinclair would be ready to begin mining in August, 1949, and predicted that it would be the largest mine in the State of Iowa.

Sinclair was a company that operated coal mines in seven midwest states, and it was the 14th largest coal producer in the United States. It had investments not only in coal mining, but also in oil, railroads, large-scale farming, and varied manufacturing establishments. People felt a little antagonistic about a giant company coming in with control vested in some far-away place. It was like a corner grocery ousted by a huge chain store.

Sinclair promised that local labor would be used except for supervisory personnel. Despite this promise, part of the workers, especially the machinery operators, were to come from Oklahoma from a mine Sinclair had just closed.

The Sinclair Company lost no time in carrying out its plans. They shipped a dragline with a 175-foot boom and a 13 cubic-yard scoop to remove the overburden, as well as caterpillar-mounted scoops which crunched through a four-foot vein. The machinery came to Tracy on 22 railroad flatcars and was an exciting show for the little boys as well as the big boys.

A large tipple which screened four sizes of coal was shipped from a





(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Pershing strip mine tippie with painting of John J. Pershing.

discontinued Oklahoma mine, and a local construction crew was hired to set it up at the mine site. Next, a loader that picks up the loosened coal and puts it into trucks arrived in Tracy.

The Company built a roadway into the mining area, and through the years made many more roads to make every part of the mining area accessible by trucks.

And so the new venture began. Mr. Cecil Wilkinson was named superintendent of the mine. Five years later, in April, 1954, Wilkinson purchased the mine from the Sinclair Company, and it was henceforth known as the Wilkinson mine.

Workers, about 55 of them, a small number compared to the 600 who had at one time worked in the Pershing mines, came from the surrounding towns - Pershing, Harvey, Knoxville, Lovilia, and Bussey. The automobile made mining camp housing unnecessary. Workers could drive in.

Operators of the dragline and the large shovels loosened up the approximately 30 feet of overburden and dumped it into heaps of dirt and slag. The exposed coal seam was subjected to blasting with a light powder to loosen the coal. Further work with the pick prepared the coal for being loaded and dumped into waiting trucks, which hauled it to the Wabash Railroad spur tracks at the tippie. It was then shipped by rail to the



Iowa Power and Light Company in Des Moines or to the Iowa Southern Utilities plant in Bridgeport.

Coal mining was doing well again after strip mining came into practice. In 1955, Marion County was mining 86.7 per cent of its coal by strip mining methods.

The Wilkinson Mine accounted for the lion's share of Marion County's output - it produced 25 per cent of the state output, about 20,000 tons a month. It was the largest mine in Iowa!! (Iowa State Mine Inspectors' Report for the Biennial Period ending December 31, 1955)

Miners discussed the pros and the cons of strip mining. They missed the camaraderie they had once had when they not only worked but lived together in the mining camps. The machine age had brought about the end of the "good old days."

Miners, as well as the general public, disapproved of the destruction of the land for farming and the uglification of the landscape covered with huge piles of slag and rock. Furthermore, land that was stripped was taken off the county tax rolls, thus eliminating a source of county income.

Sinclair had assured Marion County that they would would rehabilitate the spoiled lands created by their mining operations. They started the process of reclamation in 1950. They flew over the area in a helicopter equipped with a seed hopper to sow a mixture of alfalfa and lespedeza grass. At a later time, they planted trees on the old slag heaps.

In August, 1963, Cecil Wilkinson, owner of the mine, announced that the huge mine would close in October. He said the decision to discontinue operations was brought about by the depletion of known areas of coal near enough to haul it economically by trucks, which carried it to the railroad.

Wilkinson said that the remaining coal was too deep for economical mining. He pointed out that in earlier years the big underground mines had already mined enormous amounts of coal out of this area. It is mind boggling to learn that despite the fact that it was apparently mined out when Sinclair took over, 3-1/2 million tons had been mined out of it through the years 1949 to 1963. Now, however, the end had come.

The huge drag line with the 175-foot boom was shipped to a company in Indiana. It was dismantled and loaded on 20 Wabash Railroad cars.



When this largest strip mine in Iowa closed its operations in 1963, much of Clay and Liberty townships was a veritable badlands of slag heaps, some of them over 100 feet high. Between the slag heaps were green sulphurous, stagnant ponds. Highway T-17 was lined on both sides for several miles by a canyon-like surrealistic type of landscape.

### **The End of Coal Mining in Marion County**

The American Coal Company, which operated the last coal mine in Marion County (and in Iowa), declared bankruptcy and closed in May 1995. It had operated at the Sanitary Landfill where it strip mined the coal; the South Central Iowa Solid Waste Agency used the resulting pit for garbage disposal. Much of this coal had gone to Iowa Southern Utilities at Centerville.

According to the geologists, only 2% of Iowa's coal has been mined. Yet, ironically, huge amounts of lignite coal from Wyoming are coming into Iowa. Each week, for example, the Burlington Railroad carries two trains of 110 cars filled with lignite to Iowa Southern Utilities in Centerville. Wyoming coal is cheap to mine because the veins are so enormously thick - up to 80 feet.

Ironical also is the fact that Iowa's old arch rivals, Appalachia and southern Illinois and Indiana, who destroyed the market for Iowa coal with their coal of lower sulphur content, now have to close their own mines. With the U. S. Clean Air Act setting ever more stringent standards for amount of sulphur allowed, their coal cannot meet the qualifications. (*Des Moines Register*, 9/6/95)

It may be that at some future time, coal mining will furnish the raw material for some type of manufacturing. Experiments to find new uses (such as plastics, for example) are being carried on.

Coal mining had constituted a fat chunk of the Marion County economy. It was a rich era in terms of the wonderfully resourceful, hard-working people who made their living in this way for so many years. And how very much Iowans were blessed in having had coal for home heating, for generating electric power for lighting and manufacturing, and for the fuel to run the railroads so as to make economic development possible.

Coal mining has been an industry of intriguing extremes as it bounced



from conspicuous spending to soup lines, from mule-drawn coal carts to electric cars, from boisterous, overcrowded mining camps to empty lands of quiet desolation, from exuberance to despair. And ironically an ending to it all while vast amounts of coal lie as yet untouched.

Coal mining in this county has had a proud history. Much of the time in the middle decades of this century, Marion County was the leading producer in the state, and in 1951 and following years, it produced as much coal as all the other counties of Iowa combined. (*Knox. Jl.-Exp.*, 4/24/52).



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Ex-miners Clyde Conner, Bussey; Ken Howard, Knoxville; and Gene Clark, Albia, love to reminisce about the old days. (They worked with Tom Wagnall in Lovilia #3.)



## Chapter 22

# IMPACT OF COAL MINING ON THE ENVIRONMENT

### Ground Collapse Over Abandoned Underground Mines

One would wonder whether all the giant holes which lie beneath the surface of our county, especially in the southeast part, might someday present a problem of the land above them collapsing.

Precautions were taken at the time coal mines were abandoned, such as leaving coal pillars to hold up the roofs and filling in the mines with various debris, wastes from mining, stones, etc. To add to surface stability, water very soon fills in the empty space of the old mines, which makes cave-ins less likely.

Yet, ground collapse does occur here and there. An anecdote recounted by a former miner described a case which took place in a pasture overlying the abandoned Lovilia #3 mine. One day a farmer was missing two of his big Belgian horses. They were discovered to be at the bottom of a 12-foot deep crater which had formed in the ground. It was impossible to get the horses up the steep sides and out of the hole. Finally, a bulldozer was used to make a slope down to the bottom of the crater, and the horses could then walk up the slope and out of the hole.

An Oskaloosa (Mahaska County) ex-miner told of a cow falling into a several-foot crater in a pasture in the area of Penn College. With great difficulty, the cow was rescued from its plight.

Many people in Pershing speak of their homes settling and walls and ceilings in their homes cracking. House foundations also show large cracks.

In the old Andersonville area, subsidence affects pasture and row crops and reduces the land area available for agriculture. Roads in this area are reported by the County Engineer's office as needing frequent repair.

According to State Geological Society personnel, "The environmental legacy from our mining of coal will be with us for decades to come, ranging from annoying nuisances to serious hazards. Thus far, in this county, damages have been relatively minor." (Geol. Survey, Newsletter #17, p18)



## **Reclamation of Strip Mining Areas: Two Examples**

At the time the Wilkinson mine was abandoned, the despoiled land made up of huge unsightly slag heaps (it looked like the Badlands) was owned by Dr. Edgar Boone Wilcox and C. H. Wilcox of Oskaloosa. They donated it to the Marion County Board of Supervisors in 1964 to be used as a wildlife refuge, and it was named the Wilcox Wildlife Preserve.

In 1977, the Supervisors asked the Wilcox heirs' approval to having part of the park used as a motorcycle park, and the Wilcoxes agreed to the plan.

The Iowa Department of Transportation developed the new motorcycle park so that it boasted over 400 acres of trail riding, a 1/2-mile competition motocross track, a 220-yard flat track, and a 160-foot hill climb. It was a motorcyclist's dream. The park grew in fame and attracted riders from as far away as California. It was a common sight to see motorcyclists whizzing up and down the steep hills while viewers held their breath in excitement and anxiety.

In 1986, after the motorcycle park had operated for nine years, the insurance companies declared that they would no longer insure the park for liability. It was too dangerous. After that, there was no way the County could keep the park open, and many citizens were just as glad.



(Harriet Heusinkveld)

Wilcox Wildlife Preserve. Slag heaps beautifully vegetated.



Then the State, which had money available from a coal tax for reclaiming land, stepped in with a view to returning the land to its natural condition. Estimated cost of this project was about five million dollars. They started in 1988 with bulldozers leveling the land on the west side of road T-17. Again, citizens were unhappy. Why not plant trees and grass and then let the land stand, a beautiful, wild area, and a monument to the historic coal industry which had dominated this area for more than 60 years?

At least the State left the east side of T-17 intact. It is today quite beautifully vegetated, and hopefully will remain as a wildlife preserve. Wildflowers blanket part of the area, and wild geese and many other birds have nested there.

An attempted reclamation area which has not fared so well is the former Diamond Block mining land south of Pella, owned by brothers Simon and Paul Vander Zyl and Frank Denicola, all of Pella, but now owned by the State of Iowa. An initial flurry of state plantings of many trees was followed by years of neglect. The first trees did not do too well because of unfortunate weather conditions at that time though a fair number of trees and brush have since that time planted themselves.

Many hunters frequent the region as well as various unsavory characters so that it seems unsafe. All kinds of junk, especially glass and cans have been dumped there so it is unsightly. Even those who formerly worked there avoid the region.

Abandoned strip mine slag heaps may be seen in various places in Marion County, but time and reclamation attempts help to erase some of the scars. Future visitors perhaps will not realize that Marion County has had a unique tradition of coal mining.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aitchison, Allison. *Iowa State Geography*. Ginn and Company. Boston, 1921.

Blake, Edith Gallo Widmer. "An Italian-American Girlhood in Iowa's Coal Country." *The Palimpsest*, Vol. 74, No. 3. State Historical Society of Iowa. Iowa City, Iowa, Fall, 1993.

Briggs, Rosa Marie. *Tipperary, Gone But Not Forgotten*. Brennan Printing Company, Deep River, Iowa, 1990.

Campbell, C. B. *The History of the Anderson Mine*. Unpublished manuscript. Genealogical Society files, Knoxville Public Library. Knoxville, Iowa. n.d.

Clarke, Thomas L. Sr. *The Clark Mine*. Unpublished manuscript. Genealogical Society files, Knoxville Public Library, Knoxville, Iowa. n.d.

Creger, Carolyn Barnett. *World War II Experiences of the Barnett Brothers*. n.p., 1995.

Coal Mining Camps, "School Legislation." *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. Oct. 1919, p. 537, and October, 1921, p. 559.

Davis, Winona. *Coal Mining in Marion County*. Unpublished manuscript, 1940.

*Des Moines Register*, George Shane. "Miners—Older and Fewer—Do Vital Job of Getting Coal Out." Nov. 15, 1942.

——— Lewis Cook Jr., "One of Last Big Iowa Coal Mines Passes From Scene." May 11, 1947.

——— Kneeland, Debra. "An Era Ends in Iowa: The Closing of Last Underground Coal Mine." October 11, 1981.

——— George Shane: "Iowa Coal: It Stoked the Fires of History." May 28, 1995.

*Des Moines Tribune*, "Fossil Farm Is A Lively Place." November 1, 1962, p. 26.



Freeman, Othella. *Flagler*. Unpublished manuscript, Genealogical Society files, Knoxville Public Library, Knoxville, Iowa, 1967.

Fry, William. *Journal: Joseph Fry and William Fry*. Unpublished manuscript, n.d.

Geery, Orbra. *Underground Coal Mining*. Unpublished manuscript, 1995.

Geery, Woodrow W. *Tales by a River Rat and Other Stuff*. Pella Printing, Pella, Iowa, 1994.

Hart, Neil E., John B. Achterhof, Paul F. Anderson, Karen Wiese. "Coal Mine Data for Eight Iowa Counties," *Miscellaneous Bulletin No. 13*. Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1977.

——— "Coal Mine Maps for Eight Iowa Counties," *Miscellaneous Bulletin No. 12*. Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa, 1977.

Harvey History Book Committee. *One Hundred Years, 1876-1976*, Harvey, Iowa. n.p., 1976.

Heusinkveld, Harriet M. "Ghost Towns in the Central Des Moines River Valley" (Chapter 12) in *Take This Exit: Rediscovering the Iowa Landscape*. Robert F. Sayre, Ed. Iowa State University Press. Ames, Iowa, 1989.

——— *Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska and Marion Counties in Iowa*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. State University of Iowa. Iowa City, Iowa, 1958.

——— *Saga of the Des Moines River Greenbelt*. Pella Printing Company, Inc. Pella Iowa, 1989.

——— *The Best of Grace Karr's Cordova News*. Fourth Printing, Pella Printing Company, Inc. Pella, Iowa, 1994.

*Knoxville Journal-Express* newspaper. All issues, 1919-1954.

Lantz, Herman R. *People of Coal Town*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1958.

Marion County Genealogical Society. *Cemeteries of Marion County, 1776-1976*. R. C. Booth Enterprises, Harlan, Iowa, 1976.



Newell, Alice Murphy. *History of Flagler*. Unpublished manuscript, Genealogical Society files, Knoxville Public Library, Knoxville, Iowa, 1937.

Olin, Hubert. *Coal Mining in Iowa*. The State Mining Board, Iowa Department of Mines and Minerals. The State of Iowa, Des Moines, 1965.

Roberts, Ron E. *Iowa Coal Town: Ordinary Ghosts and Everyday People*. Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa, 1986.

Rutland, Robert. "The Mining Camps of Iowa." *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. January, 1956. pp. 35-42.

Schantz, Tim. "The Wilcox Wild Life Preserve." *Newsletter of the Red Rock Lake Association*, Knoxville, Iowa, 1993.

Schwieder Dorothy. *Life and Work in Iowa's Coal Mining Communities. 1895-1925* Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1983.

— — — "Drawing the Personal Narrative into the Landscape of Iowa's Coal County," *The Palimpsest*. State Historical Society of Iowa, Fall 1993.

State Mine Inspector. "History of Coal Mining in Iowa." *Annals of Iowa*. July, 1947, pp. 61-63.

"The Vanishing Coal Mine," *Annals of Iowa*. October, 1949, pp.142-150.

Van Dorpe, Paul E. "Ground Collapse Over Abandoned Mines." *Iowa Geological Survey Newsletter #17*, Centennial Edition, 1992, p. 18.

Wapello County Historical Society, Ottumwa, Iowa. *The Ottumwa Coal Palace, 1890-1891*. Pamphlet compiled by Tom Quinn, 1989.

Wilson, Douglas. *The Barnetts and Flagler*. Unpublished manuscript, 1995.



## INDEX

## A

Accidents, 46, 53, 104-107,  
163, 179  
Albia, 113, 147  
Allen, Leona Rowland, 156  
Allerton, 40  
Amendments, U. S. Const.  
18th, 102, 103  
19th, 98  
Anderson Fault, 71  
Anderson Mine, 68-70  
Andersonville, 76-77, 180,  
188  
Appalachia, 12, 186  
Appanoose County, 12, 124  
Artesian well, Flagler, 29  
Attica, 86, 88, 152, 155, 170

## B

Bank closings, 125, 129  
Bank robberies, 47, 48  
Bannister, Robert, 138  
Barnett Creger, Carolyn, 169  
Barnett family, 67  
Jack, 159-161  
"Big" John, 164  
Reunion, 168  
Sarah, 163  
Tommy, 163  
Barnett #3 Mine, 161, 162  
Baseball, Everist, 63  
Pershing, 75, 99, 101  
Basketball, 51  
Bath house, 43, 111, 121, 122  
Black Diamond, Dunreath,  
33, 34  
Bausch, Mabel, 65, 87  
Beardsley, Gov. 15  
Bevan, Godfrey, 180  
Big Six Mine, 183  
Black damp, 107  
Black Diamond, Harvey, 51  
Black Hand, 130  
Black lung, 166  
Black powder, 171  
Blacks, 96, 101, 124  
Blueprint Pershing Mine,  
80, 81  
Bocce, 164  
Bonni's Cash and Carry, 73,  
143  
Brady, Mabel, see Bausch  
Bridges, Cecil, 132-3  
Bucknell, Ed, 136  
Burlington Railroad, 22, 36,  
50, 69, 126, 187  
Bussey, 147, 174  
Buwalda. Bros., 181

Buxton, 76, 124, 170

## C

Campbell, C. B., 68  
Captive mines, 12  
Cedar Creek, 63  
Chicago Hottentots, 51  
Chicago, R. I. & Pacific RR.,  
(see Rock Island)  
Chicago, Burlington, and  
Quincy (see Burlington)  
Civil War, 12  
Civilians Conservation  
Corps, 131, 137  
Clarke Mine, 27  
Clarke, Thomas, 22, 29, 30  
Coal Miner Days, Melcher-  
Dallas, 49  
Coal Ridge Church, 12, 24  
Coalport, 12, 21, 23, 24  
Cobalt, 26, 58  
Cochrane, John, 34  
Company Store,  
Andersonville, 66  
Everist, 61, 64  
Flagler, 28, 83  
Pershing, 82-85  
Consolidated Indiana Coal  
Co., 12, 40-41  
Continental Overall Co., 140  
Cretaceous Sea, 18

## D

Dallas, 40  
Darnell, Erma Long, 115  
Davis, A. A., 60  
Nora, 61  
Denicola, Frank, 181, 190  
Depression, 37, 53, 127-134  
Des Moines, 58  
Des Moines River, 50, 52,  
164  
Diamond Block Coal Co.,  
181, 182, 190  
Dieleman, Renier, 180  
Dixon Coal Co., 180  
Dream of the Coal  
Miner's Child, 54, 117  
Durfee School, 86  
Dunreath, 31, 33-39  
Carey's Store, 37, 38  
Cemetery, 30  
Depot, 36  
Dunreath Coal Co., 25, 30,  
35-36, 136, 180

## E

18th Amendment, 102-103

Electra, 40  
English Creek, 67, 69  
Equator, 18  
Erickson, Agnes, 141, 152  
Ethnic groups, 14, 27  
Evans, 146  
Everist, 76, 77, 59-63, 147,  
151, 152, 157

## F

Farmers, 14, 15  
Fault, 20  
First Aid, 112  
Flagler, 21, 23-30, 180, 181  
Foote, George, 131  
Foreclosures, 127  
Fortner, Carl, 29  
Mine, 29  
Fourth of July,  
Andersonville, 72  
Bussey, 72, 164  
Everist, 59-63, 76, 77, 147,  
151, 154  
Fry (Moses) Edna, 61, 76,  
77, 149  
Joseph, 76, 77, 146-150  
Mary, 149  
William, 77, 141, 150-153

## G

Geery, A.C., 53, 145  
Orbra, 106, 107  
Woodrow, 52, 53  
Glaciers, 18  
Kansan, 18  
Goff, Jim, 66  
Gott, Charles, 141  
George, 15  
Greater Mammoth Vein  
Coal Co., 16, 59, 74, 76,  
150, 159, 183  
Gutch, Dr. Thomas, 113

## H

Hall, Henry, 135, 147  
Thomas, 147  
Hammill, Gov. John, 126  
Harding, Pres. Warren, 108  
Harlem Globe Trotters, 51  
Harrison, Pres. Benjamin, 14  
Hayes, Joyce Barnett, 67, 167  
Kenneth B., 167, 176, 178  
Holdsworth, Robert, 179  
Howell Station, 23

## I

Indiana Consolidated Coal  
Co., 40-43



Iowa Dept. of Natural  
Resources, 43

Iowa Dept. of  
Transportation, 189

Iowa Geologic Survey, 188

Iowa Power & Light, 179,  
185

Iowa State Highway Dept.,  
86

Iowa Southern Utilities, 186

Island, The (Harvey), 32

## J

Johnston, Wilma, 42-43

## K

Karr, Grace, 38

Knoxville, 80, 127, 140

## L

Laird Hill, 76

Lane, Gerald, 171

Latter Day Saints, 28

LeGrand, J. W., 35, 37

Lepidodendrons, 165

Lewis, John L., 110, 132, 138

Liberty School, 66, 67, 103

Liberty Township, 50, 59

Lick's Creek, 52

Liquor raids, 102, 103

List, The, 108, 109

Little, Tom Sr., 171, 172

Long, Earl, 157-8

Lost City, 163

Love, E. P., 77, 128

Love, James, 171

Loveless, Herschel Gov., 41,  
172

Lovilia #3 mine, 31, 176-179

Lovilia #4 mine, 179

Lucas County, 12

## M

Mafia, 129, 130

Mahaska County, 13, 15,

Marion County, 13, 14, 15,  
185-7

Marshall, Isabelle, 87

Marvelli, Bruno, 130

McCagg Mine, 66, 160-161,  
180

McConville, Ben, 39

McKenzie & Geery Mine, 51

McKinley (Pres) Wm., 14

Mechanical Mine, 176-178

Melcher, 40, 41, 42

Melcher Bank, 125

Melcher-Dallas, 31, 40-49

Melcher Coal Company, 44

Midwifery, 116

Miners' Hall, Flagler, 28, 29,

Melcher, 31, 45

Pershing, 93, 138

Million Dollar Miracle, 41

Miners' Hospital, 113

Monroe Block Coal Co., 181

Monroe County, 13, 15, 25,  
26

Morgan Valley, 21

Moses, Deborah, 77, 78,  
114-116

Motorcycle Park, 189

Mules, 55-57, 59

## N

National Independent Coal

Leaders, 173

Natural Gas Pipeline, 67, 72

Neagle, Mr., 83, 85

Newton Coal Co., 181, 182

Nichols, Art, Sam, 36

19th Amendment, 98

Norfolk and Western R., R.,  
39

## O

Oak Hill Mine, 27

O'Brien Mine, 107, 171, 172

Olympic Games, 167

Oskaloosa, 140

Overall factories, 140

Overturf, A. B., 171

Ottumwa Coal Palace, 13, 14

Ottumwa, 145

Owens, Owen, 45

## P

Pella, 51, 139, 181

Rolscreen (Pella Corp), 140

Penn Coal Co., 180

Pennsylvanian Sea, 18

Pershing, John J. Gen., 74

Pershing Fuel Co., 17, 35,  
101, 104, 128, 168

Pershing Mining Camp, 73-  
134

Baseball, 75, 99, 100, 101

Churches, 93, 96

Highways, 85, 86

Labor Day, 140

#12 mine, 84, 133, 134,  
154, 157

#14 mine, 135-140, 154

Miners' Hall, 9, 138

Mercantile Co., 82, 84

Opera House, 99

Peddlers, 82, 83

Police, 84

Pool Halls, 84

Roads, 84-86

Savings Bank, 155

School, 86-90

Stockholders, 79, 80

Streets, 90-91

Transportation, 84, 85

Utilities, 91

Watters Park, 141

Youth Center, 96

Polk County, 12

Price Codes (Coal), 136

Prices, Groceries (1940s), 138

Provenzano John (Cooney),  
140

## R

Ray, Gov. Robert, 17

Red Rock Coal Co., Melcher,  
138

Red Rock Coal & Mining  
Co., 33, 46

Red Rock Lake, 39

Reunions, Barnett, 46

Flagler, 30

Pershing, 140, 142

Riggen Mine, 51, 181

Robberies, Melcher, 47-48

Pershing, 129-30

Rock Island R.R., 40, 50, 67,  
69

Rogers, Samuel, 74

Romeo, Roxie, 108

Roosevelt, Pres, F D., 129,  
132

Rowland, Gerald, 156

Tom, 77, 80, 122, 135, 139,

152-53, 154-158

Tom Jr., 101, 156

Ryerson, George, 84, 98

## S

Sand Ridge, 159

School Legislation, 86, 87

Schools, Attica, 86, 88

Durfee, 86,

Fairview, 88

Flagler, 28

Harvey, 51-52

Pershing, 86-90

Liberty, 66

Shiloh, 62

Victory, 88

Vigilance, 88

White Walnut, 34, 39

Shipping mines, 68, 70

Sinclair mines (see  
Wilkinson)

Smoky Hollow Mine, 130

Soup lines, 127-128

Steamboats, 23

Stock market crash, 127

Strikes, 43, 119-124, 126

Strip Mining, 179-186

Subsidence, 188



Success Mine, 34  
Sulphur, 179, 186  
Swan, 21, 25

### T

Tales By a River Rat, 42,  
164  
Templeton, Principal, 88-89  
Tipple, 70  
Tracy, 59, 84, 86, 87,  
Tracy-Pershing Commuter  
route, 84

### U

Union Coal Company, 26  
United Mine Workers of  
America, 26, 44, 92,  
93, 109, 110, 132  
United States Government,  
70

### V

Valley Savings Bank, Des  
Moines, 128  
Vander Zyl, Herb, 182, 183

Logan, 182  
Loren, 181,  
Paul, 181, 182, 190  
Simon, 181, 182, 190  
Vander Zyl's Coal Yard, 181  
Van Gorp, H. P., 139  
Vercellino, Tony, 65, 82, 126,  
143  
Store, 74

### W

Wabash Railroad, 25, 33,  
34, 39, 50, 84, 184-5  
Wabash, Coal & Mining Co.,  
33  
Waters, Frosty, 103  
Watters, Joseph, 141, 142  
What Cheer, 154  
Whistles, 104  
White damp, 172  
White Walnut School, 34  
Whitebreast Fault, 71  
Whitebreast Fuel Co., 12,  
27

Wignall, Tom, 170-174, 176  
Tom. Jr., 172, 179  
Wilcox Wild Life Preserve,  
189-190  
Wilkinson, Cecil, 184, 185  
Wilkinson Mine, 183-186  
Williams, Billie, 179  
Wilson, Douglas, 167  
Elizabeth, 167  
Randy, 167  
Robert, 167  
Scott, 167  
Women's role, 114-118, 163  
World War I, 74  
World War II, 113, 136, 16,  
168-9  
W.P.A., 131  
Wyoming coal, 187

### Z

Zion Methodist Church,  
Pershing, 74, 75, 94-96,  
158







The coal mine - dirty? dark? damp? dangerous? Yes, yes, to all these queries. Yet, the miners loved their work. The following little ditty expresses their sentiments.

*Come all you young fellers, so young and so fine,  
And seek not your fortune in the dark, dreary mine.  
It will form as a habit and seep in your soul  
Till the stream of your blood is as black as the coal.*

*Where it's dark as the dungeon and damp as the dew,  
Where the dangers are double and the pleasures are few,  
Where the rain never falls and the sun never shines,  
It's dark as the dungeon way down in the mines.*

*It's many a man I've seen in my day  
Who lived just to labor his whole life away.  
Like a fiend with his dope, or a drunkard his wine,  
How a man lusts for the life of the mine.*

— author unknown

*Coal Mining Days in Marion County, Iowa 1880s-1990s* is Harriet Heusinkveld's third book which is set in Marion County. *The Best of Grace Karr's Cordova News* (1991) and *Red Rock, Iowa: Annals of a Frontier Community, 1843-1969* (1993) deal with other aspects of the exciting lore of this central Iowa area. Previous to the Marion County books, she wrote *Saga of the Des Moines River Greenbelt* (1989) and *Legends of the Mayas of Yucatan, Mexico* (1989). She has contributed one chapter to Robert Sayre's *Take This Exit* (1989).